

THE SHIPBUILDERS

By the Same Author

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Fiction

THE VALIANT HEART
LATE HARVEST
DAVID AND JOANNA
SEA TANGLE
THE PATH OF GLORY
ETC

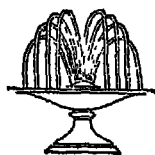
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General

DOWN TO THE SEA
THE HEART OF SCOTLAND
REST AND BE THANKFUL
ETC.

THE SHIPBUILDERS

by
GEORGE BLAKE



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14 ST. JAMES'S PLACE LONDON

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To
MY SON MICHAEL

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CHAPTER ONE

A SHIP IS LAUNCHED

IT WAS all over. The ship *Estramadura*, taking the water like a swan, was safely launched. And here was the party at cake and wine in the boardroom, garrulous in reaction from the strain.

Leslie Pagan knew that he ought to have been particularly pleased, but he felt empty and lost; and that worried and puzzled him. He was not, he reflected, a chap given to thinking much about his states of mind, and to be thus aware of detachment from the people about him was like feeling the first symptoms of an oncoming cold. Odd, indeed, to be standing thus before the big fireplace, ostensibly chatting to little Mrs. Moles, the Consul's wife, and yet to feel remote from it all, a mere spectator of the ceremony that succeeds the launching of a new vessel. Had the woman suddenly broken off her chatter and challenged him to repeat her last remark, he could not for the life of him have done it.

Perhaps it was natural that his mind should be on the ship. (A glance through the window across the tangled derricks and litter of the yard assured him that they were getting her safely to the fitting-out berth, the tugs nosing like little animals at her bow and flanks.) She was a beauty; to the making of her he had brought a passionate concern. Then, God knew, that last anxious business of her launching had been a trial for him, as it always is for every builder of ships. (Remember the *Daphne* that went over from the stocks at Linthouse and carried scores of good men to death in the Clyde.) For the man with the responsibility, the pretty ceremony of breaking wine on steel plates had been an irritating irrelevance.

But it had gone well. The *Estramadura* was safely launched. Little Mrs. Moles, after much giggling and a display of girlish ignorance, had raised the bottle in her gloved hand, cried the brave name aloud, and let the silken ribbons swing. A thin metallic sound of splintered glass, a small spirt of foam, a wet smear on the sheer bows of the ship—and then the awful moment when the

hammers thudded on the chocks and drag-chains rattled, and it seemed that she would never move; then moved ever so slowly, then seemed to stop, and at last slipped away, roaring and at a speed that brought the heart to the mouth, to take the water with a rush, plunge wildly once, shiver a little, then come to rest—safely launched and water-borne. Now they had her snug in the fitting-out basin, and Leslie Pagan saw with his mind's eye a flickering film of her progress towards completion, saw her steam out at length, all white paint and yellow funnels, for her trials over the measured mile at Skelmorlie.

And little Mrs. Moles, kittenish on this great day of her life, was still talking, while he said "Yes" and "No" and "Oh, indeed!" mechanically.

Distraction came at last.

"Excuse me a moment," he said hurriedly. "My father . . ."

The old man had stood up and was rapping on the polished mahogany for attention.

"Ladies and gentlemen, will you see to it that your glasses are charged?"

A lovely figure of an old gentleman, Leslie reflected, the recognition coming on a wave of emotion. Seventy-eight, but tall and straight as a soldier; clean-shaven, with only a hint of the old-fashioned in his double-breasted buff waistcoat, his stock, and a suspicion of whisker, still ruddy like his thick strong hair, before his ears. A gentleman of the old school, indeed—though his grandfather had been a ploughman and his father had spoken nothing else but the broad Scots tongue.

Son watched father with the detachment that had so strangely come upon him. He saw him immobilize the hurrying waiters with a glance, marked the familiar grasp of the lean hand at the left lapel, heard the small preliminary cough. And he knew what the speech would be.

It was well delivered this day of the *Estramadura's* launching, but it had a new power to depress Leslie Pagan. Lord, how the old man lived in the warm security of the past, in the greatness of glories departed! Clyde-built . . . the grand old theme, but a bitter one in a year of doubtful grace.

Yes, they had built beautifully in Pagan's—clippers in the day of such beauties, swift steamers for coastal routes (for they left the bigger stuff to others), destroyers of grace and speed, yachts of moving loveliness. There were the

half-models of them on the walls, as the old man's white hand indicated : a fine flotilla, created by men who had the art of the thing in their blood, mighty craftsmen before the Lord. It was a fine story to tell, and no one could tell it better or more lovingly than his father, who had lived through the most splendid chapters of it—but was it not near an end ?

There was not a single order on the books.

That was what he could not get out of his mind. That accounted for his uneasiness and for the detachment of which he was so unusually aware. Not a single order on the books ; the fine, long story of Pagan's come to an end after all these years. And the old man drivelling away—he used the word in his mind—drivelling away as if everything was as it used to be.

The devil of it was that he had tried more than once to get his father to understand, and failed. He had gone through all the obvious arguments—the fantastic shrinkage of world trade ; the development of building abroad ; state subsidies to foreign builders and owners ; the ghastly mess of currencies. But the old man would just not see it, as if his wonted clarity of mind were befogged by the assumptions of age. A passing phase, my boy. Lived through half a dozen slumps in my day, and none the worse of it. It will all come right. No patience, you young fellows. Plenty of reserves. . . .

Yes, plenty of reserves. It was a thought that, to his vague surprise, frightened Leslie Pagan. If he were to chuck it all up to-morrow, he would still have plenty to live on, quite apart from the large sum of money he would get from his father in due course. Why, after all, carry on in face of those economic facts he could not elude ? Why ?

For relief from the problems that so instantly and awkwardly beset him he made his eyes focus on the scene about him. His father stood, tall and distinguished, beyond the mahogany table, talking. It was a fine fire that blazed behind him. (One at each end of the room ! It was the first time he had thought of the wastefulness of it.) Faces of men and women round the table, smiling a little vacantly, nodding to the old man's periods, glasses in their hands. The half-models glistened on the walls, taking the firelight as the October dusk closed in. A waiter, absurdly holding a bottle by its neck in a napkin, stood under the portrait (by Sir John Watson Gordon, P.R.S.A.) of grandfather John

Pagan. Through the window he could see the gantries against the evening sky that was darkling over the holms of Renfrewshire.

His eyes came to rest on the hat of little Mrs. Moles before him. In his aloofness from life he saw it as preposterous that a human being should cover her hair with such decorative absurdities. A shell of felt with a band of silk round it, and gee-gaws embroidered on the silk—good God! And he knew that it was a cheap hat. Poor little soul, acting the Consul's wife and launching ships on her husband's six hundred a year!

The train of thought brought his eyes to rest at length on his own wife—Blanche, standing there near the old man and smiling encouragement and possession at once into his face. That was Blanche: not often to be discovered in public in an attitude quite perfectly natural. She was not an actress, not a fool in her poses, but inveterately it was a studied and composed façade she presented to the Scottish world about her. He hated the thought which invaded his mind in that moment of aloofness, but all his senses were too alert to permit of a conventional self-deceit. How could this Blanche, this Englishwoman he had taken for a wife, understand what the old man said of the traditions of the Clyde and the Scots artisan? And he knew that she cared little. He knew that the end of Pagan's, or the end of his connection with Pagan's, would naturally and inevitably delight her. Farewell to dirty Clydeside, to drab, unpolished Glasgow!

He was afraid, and more afraid of her power over him than exasperated by the intrusion of the feminine into his man's life. He loved her. He remembered the girl she had been. A thousand sweet intimacies could not be forgotten. She had taken his body to hers, craving to receive and nurture his seed. She was the mother of John.

Dear, difficult Blanche, for whom his love was at once a warmth and an uncasiness! Out of the windows of his detachment he was seeing her that day afresh. Middle-age, that comes early to her blonde type, was still at bay before her spirit and watchfulness. Her hair and complexion were as bright and fresh as ever, her eyes as blue and quick. Was there a shade of heaviness showing under her jaws and about the throat? And for all the slimmness of her ankles in their silk, for all the slender sauvity of her waist, was there not a tell-tale spreading of the hips?

To admit these things to himself was to be all the prouder of her smartness. She was still eager in life, still gay in exile, with her neat and severe brown costume and her little hat snugged down over her left eye at that adorably girlish angle. Why, at this particular moment, must he see her as a sweet enemy?

He was checking himself for disloyalty in thought when a shuffling among the company told him that his father was nearing an end of his speech. There was a flutter of mild applause, then:

"And now that your glasses are charged, ladies and gentlemen, I ask you to drink good luck to the *Estramadura* and her owners."

Good luck! Good luck! Good luck! The phrase sounded round the table, polite and automatic for the most part. "The *Estramadura* and her owners!" Old, deaf Mr. Maciver of the Lighthouse Trust was a little late with his bellow of "Good luck to *Estramadura*—and to Pagan's!" and some ladies had to check their sniggers.

Leslie Pagan started to move through the press towards his wife, murmuring apologies. Señor Martinez, for the owners, was speaking, but he knew what the man would say. They had built ships for South Americans before and heard scores of flowery Latin insincerities. "The repootacion of the Clyde—we know it well in Araguay. . . . Tha name of Pagan, it is 'what you say 'ouse'old werd among ar peple. . . ." Damned little, Dago, nosing for months past into other people's business, always exasperatingly polite and warily mean. The thing was to see that the ship was secure in the basin and to know how Blanche proposed to spend the evening.

He reached her side when the last toast was being drunk. "Pagan's. . . ." Well, his father had said all he wanted to say and would be brief in reply. "Pagan's. . . ." The people were stirring to get away even as the old man spoke. He whispered into her ear.

"Going home now, Bee? I've got the Riley outside, and I won't be a minute at the basin."

"Oh, good-evening, Mrs. Graham! So nice of you to come. . . ."

That was Blanche playing the hostess with perfect grace and complete insincerity. It had to be done, he supposed; and Mrs. Graham and a dozen others deserved no more. What worried him was that the triviality should have so curiously affected him.

She turned to him, the conventional smile fading from about her lips.

"My dear, I must go to the Club for an hour at least," she confided to him. "Whyte's waiting for me in the Daimler. I'll be back about seven. You'll remember that Sir Archie's coming in this evening."

"Oh, I see. Right you are, dear."

His answer sounded a little empty. He had so much wanted to be alone with her after the fuss and boredom of the ceremony. Vaguely he resented that pull of the Club—that passion for Contract that was to him almost incomprehensible; and he was quite definitely dismayed by the thought of an evening with Sir Archie, to him the empty and garrulous second holder of a Lord Provost's conventional baronetcy. It was a pity they could not have a cosy and intimate evening alone together.

Blanche stood up, smoothing her gloves over her shapely hands.

"About seven, then, darling?" she said.

"Yes, about seven. I've got some things to do here first," he answered.

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He spent more time with the yard manager and the foreman rigger than he needed to do. Though he knew that they were anxious now, the ship safely moored, to get back to their Corporation bungalows up in Queenshill, something moved him to hang about where the tall vessel overshadowed the quay.

"Moorings all right now, Tosh?" he asked.

"Safe as houses, Mr. Leslie," answered the foreman rigger.

"It's not likely to blow to-night, is it?"

"I'm sure it's not, sir. Besides, I've got a squad standing by."

"Good!"

But still he could not go, and the other two waited while he walked the length of the ship and back again. He knew she was safe as she could be. But he did not want to go. Young John would be alone in his nursery at home. But would Blanche be gone in the Daimler that he had seen standing behind the main gates?

He hailed the yard manager in a low voice.

"Any word from the boiler-shop, Mr. Crawford?"

"They're ready as soon as we are."

"Good!"

It was all very silly. There was nothing he could do. He was keeping two decent men from their tea. He felt their uneasiness rolling towards him out of the shadow in which they stood.

"Well, I suppose it's all right," he said at length, his voice echoing back from the high cliff that was the newly launched *Estramadura*. "She's a nice job, when you look at her."

"A topper!" said the foreman rigger gravely.

"As nice a job as we've ever done," added Mr. Crawford.

As nice a job as Pagan's had ever done. And there was not a single order on the books to follow her.

Leslie strove to order his mind.

"Well, there's nothing more, I suppose?" he asked a little emptily.

"Nothing, Mr. Leslie. She's fine now."

"Righto! I'll get along. Good-night, boys."

"Good-night, sir."

He walked up towards the gate, threading his way almost unconsciously through the piles of timber and angle-iron and over the rails and ropes that would have been the undoing of a stranger. Not a single order on the books—it was incredible. Yet he had to grasp and master it. "Pagan's Closing Down"—he saw the bills of the Glasgow evening papers. Or they would be more likely to make it "Clyde Shipyard Sensation"; and he would read it as he passed for the last time along the mean little main street of Dalpatrick, seeing it blaze from the boards before every grubby little newsagent's shop.

He came up to the Riley, standing by the timekeeper's office. Old Donald Macrae, superannuated from rigging these fifteen years, hirkled out to greet him.

"Hullo, Donald! My wife gone?"

"She's awa' in the big caur wi' the man."

"Right. I'll get along too. A nice launch to-day."

"It was that, sir," replied the old man, closing the door of the car. "As clean a job as ever I seen. Good-night, sir."

Good-night! Good-night! He was hearing too many good-nights with the note of finality in them, thought Leslie as he turned into the street. And now there was

nothing to do but go home and await Blanche's return. She was off to her Club, to her inveterate Bridge. (Again he had to try to resist the feeling of being deserted, and could not.) John would be at home in his nursery; dear, precious John, at the thought of whom his heart beat faster. But he could not spend two hours, three hours with John, waiting for Blanche to come home and complete the circle that seemed to have been so strangely and ominously broken.

He swung the car into the Dumbarton Road, with so much of the life of Glasgow pulsing along its sidewalks and in swaying, coloured trams and juggernaut buses, with the pavements aglow in reflections from lighted shop windows: all lively after the grey drabness of the streets by the riverside; and in the very act of turning he knew what he would do—stop at O'Glinchey's public house and find some of the old hands at the bar there and, as he loved to do now and again, stand them a drink. Danny Shields would be among them, and long Jock Macgrory out of the paint store, and Jimmy Affleck the cranesman. To-night it seemed imperative he should see them, those rough innocents whose destinies were so strangely in his hands.

He was still seeing himself and his actions as from a distance. For the first time he fully realized the oddness, in the world's eyes, of master drinking with man. It would have troubled his father, who was just, but saw industry as a stern battlefield, with Capital and Labour as implacable and natural enemies. And it would have horrified Blanche, this rough drinking in such a place with such men.

Parking the Riley in the side-street, he pushed open a swing-door to be met by a gust of hot, exhausted air, heavy with the mingled smells of sawdust, strong tobacco, oily clothes and beer. The house was busy, burly men in working clothes and dirty cloth caps two deep along the counter. The ugly tongue of Clydeside assailed his ears, every sixth word a fierce and futile obscenity; they spat much as they seemed to breathe. He saw the scene as one of degradation, and yet, understanding, he neither recoiled nor condemned. They were the men he knew—passionate, strong and true to the core.

His quick glance took in many a familiar face that smiled an uneasy greeting, but he saw the group of older hands he sought, deep in argument in a corner by the fire. They greeted him with respectful forthrightness.

"Evenin', boss!" said they all.

"Evening, boys! What about the usual drink to the ship? Yours, Jock?"

They all said the same—"Hauf and hauf-pint, if you please"—that strange and powerful solace of the Scots working-man: a half-glass of whisky taken neat and washed down by a glass of the heavy Scotch ale. Leslie ordered glasses and pints for them, as he knew they expected, a whisky and soda for himself.

"Best respects, boss," the murmur went round the circle, and the whisky disappeared. They would linger over the beer to talk.

He was never uneasy with those old hands, who had taught him so much of their trades in his apprenticeship. Nor could talk flag long where Danny Shields was: Danny Shields, bow-legged, broad-shouldered riveter whom a hard life and four years of Gallipoli and Sinai and Palestine and Flanders had left with the heart and mind of a boy. Now, however, there was a gravity on that odd, birdlike face with the strong clean-shaven lips and jaw.

"Some of them are sayin' doon in the yard, boss," he began at once, "that there'll mebbe be a big pay-off."

Leslie's heart sank. How did these things get around? How could he tell them the cold truth?

"Things are not looking too good," he admitted gravely. Then he shook fear from him. "But there are enquiries—some enquiries coming in. We're not done yet."

"Aye, trade's gey bad all the same." This was long Jock Macgrory, a grave man with a thin, drooping moustache of grey and a nasal impediment in his speech. "Dalmuir closed for good. Fairfield empty. Caird's doon bye at Greenock closed for good. Thon wee place at Old Kilpatrick. . . . Christ! Govan looks like a bloody cemetery. It's hard times right enough for the Clyde."

"Well, we've been gey lucky at Pagan's," broke in Jimmy Affleck—desperately, as it seemed to Leslie.

And Danny Shields's strong spirit rose to meet the challenge of pessimism, to refuse it existence.

"Aye, and our luck's going to stay wi' us!" he cried. "Good health and respects again, boss!"

He plunged at his tankard and drained it vehemently.

"Yes," said Leslie, putting down his empty glass also, "we're not going to worry yet. And now I must get along. Can I give anybody a lift?"

"If you could drop me at Scotstoun, sir——" suggested Danny modestly.

"Come along, then. Good-night, boys."

Good-night! Good-night! Always that sombre phrase. He hardly spoke to the man in the seat beside him as they sped up the busy road towards Glasgow. This new awareness of his responsibility would not leave him. The best part of a thousand men, with their women and children, depended on him. It was easy enough at most times to see them, in his father's way, as a mass, impersonally, but with eyes sharpened by the imminence of danger he saw them as individuals capable of suffering—decent able workmen like Danny Shields and long Jock Macgrory and Jimmy Affleck to be put out on the dole, to hang about street corners, to be denied their right to work, to know emptiness indescribable!

The voice of Danny roused him from his brooding.

"This'll do me, sir."

"Right you are, Danny."

He steered the car into the kerb and the little man clambered out on to the pavement.

"I'm very much obliged to you, sir——"

And must he, too, say that fatal good-night—Danny Shields, who had been his batman from the beginning of the war to its end and was his friend, bound to him by ties innumerable and strong? They had shared danger, degradation, and folly. Above the relationships of master and man, officer and private, they had lived together every emergency of the masculine world; Danny Shields ever with the desperate humour of the western Scot on his lips, the grin of inexhaustible mischief on his face, and courage and steadfastness in his simple heart—a man.

Leslie had almost let him go, when something moved him to a confidence.

"Danny!" he said sharply.

"Sir."

"I say, Danny, if—if there have to be changes at the Yard, you're not to worry. I'll see that you have a job. That all right?"

The habit of the old soldier asserted itself in Danny Shields then. Squaring his body, he clicked his heels and swung his hand in a salute to the stained cap of cheap tweed.

"Yes, sir," he replied.

The car, as if it drove itself, turned northwards for Anniesland Cross, and Leslie Pagan, seeing now and again the myriad lights of Glasgow straddling in regular rows its innumerable hills or strung along these drumlins of clay, had a sudden vision of the city's unwieldy vastness—of a hopeless complex of lives and interests all resting on heavy industry in decay, with a canker at its heart; perhaps a city doomed. There was not a single order on the books. Seeking to disentangle and assess the factors in the economy of a world gone mad, he could not in the moment allow himself to hope.

His own house, when he drove up to its door along the drive through the dingy rhododendrons, seemed fatuously big. So many rooms for three of them to live in! (Had Blanche really been afraid of another child after the agony of the first?) It actually took four servants to minister to their wants—five counting Whyte, the chauffeur! Just waste—while Danny Shields went back to two small rooms in a Partick tenement: folly, self-indulgence and waste. Life was building ships and not this luxuriating among redundancies. He laughed at himself bitterly for leaving the car to be put away by Whyte—into the garage that was roomier and warmer than any house a riveter could ever hope to live in.

But there was John, and there was nothing he would not do to make John happy and secure. He whistled as he ran upstairs to the day nursery, away from this unwonted blackness of introspection, and shouted "Jocko! Jocko!" as he went.

"Hullo, daddy!"

The small voice was friendly but cool. John, at the age of eight, was liable to be absorbed in that to which he had momentarily set his hand. Now he was making an intricate model of Meccano parts so that his father had to stoop to kiss that soft, aloof cheek. It was Leslie's secret regret that he had to struggle always to rouse any sign of demonstration in his little son, so fair of hair, so dark and intelligent of eye.

"What are you making, old lad?" he asked.

"A stamp for crushing ore," the child replied. "What's ore, daddy?"

That was better. It gave him access to the sanctuary that was the boy's mind. Leslie squatted beside him, gravely explanatory.

"And I'd put that pulley in the middle of the spindle," he added, "right in the dead-centre. See, it's slowing up the whole affair by bearing on the flange."

"But it slipped along while I was screwing it in," the child explained.

"Yes, but a good engineer gets things right somehow. Look here. . . . Where's the screwdriver?"

He took up the absurdly small tool. John's eyes on his hands, and made the adjustment in a few dexterous, sure movements.

"There. Dead centre. Where's your driving belt? Too long—we'll shorten it a bit. Now then. Try that."

Gravely the boy turned the crank, and the model worked. They were happy; a job had been done. But as he watched the gravely rapt eyes of his son, Leslie took to thinking again of their relationship. It was perfect ostensibly; but why must he always have to grope to make contact with John? It was as if there was a technique of parenthood. It was hard for a man to have to admit to himself that even in dealing with his own child he was dealing with another individuality, a creature with his own separate rights and needs.

The passionate desire within him to have the boy's interest to himself drove him back to an old device. Knowing that John must listen, knowing that he could not help giving his attention, he started to tell a story out of his own experience.

"I say, Johnnie——" he began.

"Yes, daddy." The cool voice admitted no more than the fact that he had heard.

"That machine of yours reminds me of one we had to put into a ship years and years ago, long before you were born."

"How old were you then?"

"Oh, about twenty-five, I suppose. It was a big ship, and she was built to carry frozen mutton from New Zealand."

"What was her name?"

"A funny name—the *Arakiki*."

"Oh!"

He knew then that he had all of John. When John said "Oh!" like that he had surrendered to a relation of

absorbing fact. They were precious moments for Leslie when he had the boy in the power of his larger experience, and now he abandoned himself to narration, playing deliberately with the detail he knew would keep the child his slave for as long as the story might last. "Oh!" said John at intervals, and it was enough for the father. He wanted to hold the child in his arms, wanted to murmur the tale into his soft hair.

The door opened, and there stepped through it a girl dressed in an overall of austere and spotless white. She did not look at Leslie; she made him feel that he did not exist.

"Your bath is ready, John," she said.

The voice was English, and it was that of one inhumanly efficient.

"Oh!" said John impatiently, but he rose to his feet.

Leslie encouraged him. The rules laid down by Blanche had to be obeyed. Even a father dared not lead rebellion.

"Hop along, son," he said. "We'll finish the story to-morrow."

John took the girl's outstretched hand and passed through the door with her. It closed, and Leslie came to himself to realise that he was sitting, no doubt an absurd figure, among the discarded toys on the floor. The Norland nurse had beaten him. The boy belonged to the women-folk, and he, that father, could only borrow him. Rising and feeling for his cigarette-case, he remembered how Blanche had insisted on a girl of high efficiency, and an English girl. "Well, if he must be brought up in Glasgow," she had said a little peevishly, "at least he can be taught to speak decently."

It was all very queer. Now he seemed to be seeing his own life as from the outside—and it was all very queer. But he knew that he must not brood thus. It was just worry: worry about the Yard and the state of trade. John would not starve. John would never lack for comforts. They ought all to be very happy together. They were very happy together. Blanche and John and himself. It was just a mood.

He passed into the lounge Blanche had furnished for herself. It was lighted by the reflection from painted ceiling and cream-papered wall of filaments within ornamental cases of frosted, tinted glass. Lalique stuff gleamed on the few low scattered tables whose legs rested on a thick-piled carpet of old gold. The squat, caressing

chairs were framed in gleaming chromium. There was a Duncan Grant over the open fireplace, in which the logs burned bright. Among the books on the table a copy of *Ulysses* in its yellow paper covers was conspicuously exposed.

The evening papers lay on a stool by the fireside. The servants had laid out the materials for cocktails, but he ignored the alluring bottles and the shining instrument in which their contents could be mixed. Why trouble the tablemaid to bring ice when Blanche would come demanding fresh stuff? He opened the *News* at the commercial page.

Blanche had said that she would be home by seven, but he knew better than to expect her then, and it was twenty past before she did appear, bringing with her into the warm room the chill of autumn from out of doors. Her greeting was bright and off-hand.

"Hullo, old boy! Home long?"

She kissed him quickly, threw her hat into a chair on the other side of the room, and pressed a bell, saying: "Oh, my God! I must have a cocktail or die."

"What luck at the Club, dear?" he asked perfunctorily.

"Lousy! Perfectly lousy, my dear! Heaven preserve me from that woman Snodgrass as a partner. Her calls! My dear. . . ."

A maid appeared at the door.

"Ice, Cameron," Blanche ordered, and Leslie felt a spasm of annoyance. He hated to hear the girls ordered about by their second names in this English way. Cameron was always Lizzie to him; and a nice girl, too. But Blanche was rattling on.

"Seen John? How is he? Don't worry, old boy—I'll mix the drinks. We've got to hurry. These people are coming at nine. Sir Archie's bringing Antanari—you know, the Scottish Orchestra man. He looks divine, and he'll play, I expect. There you are, Lal. Loud cheers!"

He raised his glass to her silently, and they drank.

"Lord, but I needed that," sighed Blanche.

The door opened again, and there stood John, the girl in white behind him. He looked fragile, pathetic and lovable in his blue dressing-gown, with the pink legs of his pyjamas beneath it and his feet in red slippers. Leslie held out his arms to him, but the child went dutifully to his mother.

"Hullo, old lad!" cried Blanche cheerfully. "Been a good son to-day? That's fine. My yummy-yum-yum!"

She kissed him on the lips and the neck. "Now go and sleep well—by-byes all night. Promise?"

"Yes, mummy," said John dutifully and made to turn for the door when Leslie's voice appealed to him.

"Good-night, son."

"Good-night, daddy."

It was a joy to get one's arms round that slim, small figure, to enfold its preciousness, to kiss the smooth cheek. To-night the boy seemed dearer than ever.

"Sleep well, sonny," Leslie murmured, "and we'll make another model to-morrow."

"Yes, daddy. Good-night. Good-night, mummy."

"Good-night! Good-night!"

The boy turned to his nurse, and together they disappeared.

"You'll spoil that infant," observed Blanche casually.

"But come and change. We're late."

"Damn these people, if you want to know my private feelings," groaned Leslie, rising.

"Hullo!" Blanche looked at him sharply. "The hump again?"

"Worry, I would call it."

"Why worry?"

It was a deliberate challenge, and he knew it. There was that of intolerance in her way of looking at him, and in her tone, that roused his defences. He spoke between tightening lips.

"For very good reasons," he answered. "There's no work coming to the Yard, for instance, and no sign of any."

Blanche's move towards the door was a comment on the non-importance of the statement in her view.

"Give up the Yard seems to me the sensible thing," she said over her shoulder. Her tone was not pugnacious, but he knew that she was really fighting a case. At the door she paused and added, apparently in jest: "Your devotion to Glasgow, Lal, is delightfully pathetic."

"That's unfair, Blanche," he sought to arrest her, his voice harsh. "You know perfectly well that's not the point."

"All right, darling," she smiled coolly. "Come along and dress like a good man."

Always she seemed able to defeat him.

CHAPTER TWO

A RIVETER AT HOME

A TOFF and a gentleman, thought Danny Shields as he walked eastward along the Dumbarton Road that night of the *Estramadura's* launching ; a toff and a gentleman.

His admiration of Leslie Pagan was flawless. To his decent working man's sense of respect for a good and efficient master there was added his memory of courage in battle, of steadfastness and kindness in the long trial of trench and camp. He never ceased to praise in his private mind and in the presence of whomsoever cared to listen the uniqueness of the younger man he adored and trusted with a faith almost religious. A toff and a gentleman !

Danny remembered much as he went along, drawing at his short pipe. He saw the fine, dark, clean-shaven face with the black hair silvered above the ears. He glowed in the recollection of brown eyes that could be stern and yet had kindness always in them. He remembered instances of the justice, the coolness, the generosity, the impatience with stupidity, the humour, and the authority of that man. He luxuriated in the pride of his knowledge that there existed between them a queer unbreakable link forged in the fire of grim experience shared. He was proud and happy.

Danny had worried in spite of his protestations. No worker on Clydeside could do anything but fear that this infection of unemployment would touch him yet. With the simple realism of his kind he knew that he was helpless under the great machine, and that even Pagan's might one day be as a score of yards up and down the River—empty, silent, while the men slouched about street corners outside and queued up automatically at the Buroo. That last offence to decency and pride might in busy moments seem unthinkable, but he knew very well in his heart that the threat was real and near.

And now Leslie Pagan had torn the black beast off his shoulders, and thrown it aside. Whatever happened, the boss would see him right and give him work to do and decent pay for that work. A fellow had nothing more to

ask of life, and the Major (as he could not stop calling him, though Leslie had endlessly protested) was a toff and a gentleman.

Danny stepped it out cheerfully, making for the Horse-shoe in Partick. He used this public house largely for the sake of the accumulator run among its regular customers by wee Hymie Harris, the bookie. Every Friday he hopefully subscribed his sixpence, praying that the teams he had drawn would score eleven goals in two matches and in two weeks win for him the prize of thirty shillings that usually depended on the issue of three Saturdays' play. Once Aston Villa, meeting small fry in the Cup Ties, had achieved this miracle for him, and though he had paid back into the pool a much greater sum than that since then, he remained unwearying in hope. Motherwell had already scored nine times in two weeks on his behalf; two goals against the Morton on Saturday and the money was his, but the beggars would probably pile up a 4—1 victory, and that would tear it. Still, it was a chance.

The bar was empty when he went in. Tommy, the charge-hand, was bent over an evening paper on the counter, and Bill, the ginger cat, blinked peacefully at his elbow against the levers. They made an interesting picture, breaking up the stretch of polished mahogany against the gantry with its myriad alluring bottles.

"Evenin', Tom!" Dan greeted the barman. "Give's a half-pint."

Automatically the barman wiped a segment of counter with his napkin, took up a glass with a flourish, and filled it, the beer gushing to the touch of the heavy handle.

"Half-pint, Dan," he said. "There ye are. Three pence—right!"

"Wee Hymie been in?"

"Aye, about five. But he's gone now."

"Will ye give him ma tanner for the accumulator?"

"Sure. He'll be in afore nine."

The man picked the sixpence from the counter, placed it in a tumbler that stood by the cash-register on the gantry, and made an entry in a grubby book he took from a drawer.

"Doin' anything on the gees these days, Danny?" he asked.

"Naw," replied Danny stoutly. "I never touch that line. It's a mug's game, the horses, if you ask me."

"Oh, I'm not so sure about that," retorted the barman

thoughtfully. "Big Jock Campbell had a three-cross double the day. Wee Hymie wasn't half mad."

"Aye, once in a lifetime!" Danny was scornful, conscious of rectitude.

"Oh, I dunno," Tommy persisted, keeping an open mind. "The boss, he was givin' me a tip the day—*Base Headland* for the three-thirty the morn. It's a good thing, mind ye."

"Mebbe it is. I'm stickin' to the footba'. Is Motherwell goin' to bate the Morton? That's the question."

"Sure. Nobs on." Tommy assured him.

"Aye, but they'll go and slap on four or five goals, and that's torn nae chance in the accumulator."

"I'm not so sure. The Morton's been playin' great these last weeks. See what they did to the Hearts, eh? And Aberdeen——"

"A flash in the pan," said Danny. He was an assiduous reader of the sporting pages of the newspapers. "Nae defence. Nae penetration in their attack. Thon big centre o' theirs is just a big cab-horse. See here. You take the Motherwell backs. . . ."

Now he was in his element, abandoned to the passion of a lifetime. It was a passion shared by all of his kind—this vivid, scientific devotion to football, this angry partisanship, that is the industrial substitute for the satisfactions of clan warfare. For more than half an hour the two men argued to and fro, now differing fiercely on the merits of a player, then agreeing almost tearfully as to the unique, the splendid skill of the Rangers. It was such a debate as rages most anxiously on Thursday evening when the Clydesider is thinking how he will fill up the coupon, the betting forecast on the Saturday's results, that will go to the small bookmaker with his shilling or two.

"Have you filled your coupon?" Tommy came to the crucial question at last.

"Naw," replied Danny, shaking a wary head. "That's the night's job for me."

"It's no' easy this week, right enough. 'It's no' easy this week, and that's a fact."

Only when he was out again in the fresh air of the Dumbarton Road did Danny realise that he had drunk more than was usual on that night of the week. Not too much; his legs were steady, but he was aware of a warmth, a recklessness, within him. It was that exhilarating talk

about football that had done it. He had gone in to pay his tanner and have a half-pint; and he had talked and drunk a half of whisky and two half-pints. Jesus! No wonder the money went. But ach to hell! The accumulator was a dead snip, and—this he recollected with a sudden exultation—he was safe for a job at the Yard, whatever happened to the rest. He felt more than usually fit to meet Agnes, his wife.

His home was in a tenement block in a featureless street between the River and the main road. Kingarth Street, Number 33; two stairs up, one room and kitchen, at a rent of seventeen shillings a week. The close, as Danny called the entrance, was pallidly lit by an incandescent burner on the scratched, damp wall, and it smelt of cats and stuffiness. The stairs were worn and dirty, and the place had altogether the drab air of a barracks. Yet Danny whistled as he climbed the steps to the door that had his own name on a brass plate upon it and the home that could boast a bathroom, though that was dark and ventilated only through a barred window giving on the common landing.

The smell of kippers cooking met him as he stepped into the unlit lobby of the flat. He heard an infant cry. Nobody came to meet him, and he went into the bathroom to wash himself under the blue flame that licked through a broken mantle. When his noisy ablutions were complete, when his face was shining red and he was comfortable again in shirt sleeves, he passed through to the kitchen.

Agnes was bent over a frying-pan on a gas-ring. She wore a print overall, but her fair hair was in curlers. At his entrance she turned on him, but as if without interest, a big-nosed, big-mouthed face.

"On the booze again, I suppose," she said.

"Shut your face!" he retorted, but without passion.

"Is ma tea ready?"

"Aye, when I'm ready. I take my own time for them that takes theirs."

Danny was not put out. He had never expected exchanges of any other kind as between spouses of eighteen years' standing. In fact, watching her at her domestic task, he reflected genially that Agnes, at thirty-six, was still a smart one.

"Where's Wee Mirren?" he asked.

"Can ye no' use yer eyes?" she replied, still intent on the sizzling kippers.

The child, of course, was on the bed that, elaborately curtained, was but a shelf filling the recess behind the door. She lay there happy, a finger in her mouth, her brown eyes welcoming her father, her bare legs twisting ecstatically.

"Hullo, wee hen!" he greeted her adoringly. When he picked her up, her tiny, fat arms went round his neck. "She's her daddy's ain wee hen."

He found a chair before the fire, placed her on his knee, and made pretence to be a horse, jogging with his lady to the fair. Wee Mirren crowed. At nearly two she had little speech at her command. Then she began to whimper, and he knew that she had had enough of the cockhorse game. Automatically he produced the fat silver watch in its worn celluloid case from his waistcoat.

It was a stage of ritual. Wee Mirren seized the watch in two chubby hands and held it to her ear, then to his.

"Tick-tock!" she gurgled. "Tick-tock!"

"Tick-tock!" he echoed. "Tick-tock! Daddy's ain Wee Mirren!"

With that he enfolded her in his arms and held her close to him as one who guards a treasure. The child whimpered.

"That's right," came the voice from the gas-ring, "spoil her."

"Ach, shut yer face!" he retorted. "She's fine. Ye're fine, aren't ye, Mirren? You and yer daddy's fine, eh?"

Just then he became aware of a warm discomfort about the legs and cried out:

"Holy Jesus! She's wet ma breeks! Christ almighty, can ye no' put a hippen on the wean?"

The figure bent over the frying-pan was suddenly energized. It shot across the room and seized the child who screamed. Danny had a glimpse of the anger—or was it hatred?—in the blazing eyes of his wife.

"Ye dirty wee ticket!" she snarled at the infant. Then she turned on her husband. "That's you and yer bumping her about, you big fool!"

"Leave the bairn alone! Leave the bairn alone!" Danny warned her.

"Can I no' get cleanin' her?" she retorted fiercely.

That was Agnes all over—her bark worse than her bite. She was good to their children—a real good mother—he was proud to think. But always she had to make her domestic life an endless battle of hard words, as if

she got satisfaction out of the wounds she made with her tongue.

Now she was vigorously wiping the limbs of the child with a rag of flannel.

"Where are the other two?" Danny asked her.

"Billy's away a message for me," she replied, absorbed in her intimate task.

"And I suppose nobody knows where that Peter is," he grumbled. "Of all the uscless loafers! God love a duck. . . ."

"Hold yer tongue, man!" Agnes interrupted him angrily. "Can ye not leave that boy alone for five minutes? Nag, nag, naggin' at him, and at me, too. It's no' his fault that he canna get work."

"No. But he can get the money to go to the Pictures, and dances, and buy these fags of his, and take his fancy molls into ice-cream shops."

"Ach, can it!" pleaded Agnes, placing Wee Mirren back in the bed. "Yer tea's ready, if these kippers are no' spoiled wi' you and yer nonsense."

They were sitting down when the boy, Billy, came in, a cheery infant of eight who whistled "The Sunshine of Your Smile" even as he handed his mother the parcel he had fetched. His roguish, sandy face grinned at his father. Then he threw his cap at Wee Mirren, gurgling on the bed.

"Hullo, son!" Danny greeted him. "How's things?"

"Okay, big boy," answered Billy, fetching himself a chair.

"And the school? How did ye get on at the school?"

"Swell, pop." Billy was a student of the Pictures. "Top o' the class."

"That doesn't mean ye can sit down at ma table wi' dirty hands. Away and wash them this minute," his mother chimed in.

"Ach, his hands are fine," Danny protected the boy.

"Get on wi' yer tea, son."

"That's right," Agnes snapped. "Make a cod of me in front of him. Well, ye'll have the two of them to look after the night."

"Out, is it? Where d'ye think ye're going?"

"I'm not thinkin'; I'm goin'. Wi' Lizzie to the Pictures, if you want to know."

"Take me, maw," begged Billy cheekily.

"You'll just stay where you are and do yer lessons and get to yer bed quick."

" Pictures ! Lizzie ! " Danny snorted. " Ye're a couple of mugs, right enough."

" I suppose ye think ye're better wi' yer pubs and coupouns."

Danny did think so, as it happened, and he was vastly uneasy over Agnes's growing dependence on her sister, Lizzie. A high-stepper, that one, with her husband, Jim Dunsmuir, turning over big money in mysterious ways connected with the cinema, the motor, and the betting trades ; with her semi-detached villa in Newlands and her Austin Twelve and her made-up face. She had started speaking Kelvinside too—her, out of a Partick fish-shop !—and God alone knew what ideas she was putting into Agnes's head ! He was at heart miserably afraid of that flashy influence, which accounted for the curlers in Agnes's hair, for her ambition to have it permanently waved—at fifteen bob, if you please !—for the fancy, newly ironed frock hanging on the clothes-horse near the fire, and for her more and more frequent jibes at his working-man's ways, at what she regarded as the limitations of their condition.

But he had nothing to say to her in this respect. ' Give and take was all very well in the small rubs of their intimate life, but he could not face her, or risk her scorn and anger, in a matter so fundamental in his philosophy. If she was going to the Pictures with Lizzie, she would go to the Pictures with Lizzie.

" To hell wi' Lizzie and the Pictures ! " he lamely countered her challenge.

2

With Agnes gone it was quiet in the kitchen. On a deal chair by the fire, his feet on the bar of it and his knees at his mouth, Billy pored over a schoolbook. Wee Mirren was sound asleep behind the curtains of the bed. At the table sat Danny, brooding over a sheet of pinkish paper.

The alarm clock ticked from the mantelpiece, and now and again from the fire ashes dropped softly. Down the street from the Dumbarton Road came the endless fabric of traffic-noises : the rush of the buses, the honk-honk of horns, the hum of tramway-motors and the clangour of their wheels. But Danny heard none of these sounds.

All his mental force was concentrated on the pinkish sheet. In an ecstasy of doubt, in an agony of reasoning, he was deciding on the bet he would make on Saturday's football.

The coupon was a document that might have bewildered even an intelligent layman, but to Danny it presented no difficulties save those of decision. Would he take Number 9 and play safe on six home wins at the frail price of 6 to 1, or play high on Pool Number 5 that had last week paid, he noted with appreciation and envy, 20 to 1 on four wins away? But Pool Number 2 had returned 54 to 1 on two home and three away results, and that, begod, was not a long shot for the man who knew his stuff. But the bookies were getting fly, cunningly limiting to those of doubtful issue the number of games a chap could choose among. It was only after much deliberation that Danny decided to put his money into Number 2, and even then the true agony of his study was only starting.

Rangers v. Hearts, Motherwell v. Celtic, Clyde v. Hamilton. . . . There was the devil of it. Look at the League tables, look at the records of the teams, and Rangers and Motherwell were odds-on chances to win at home, but the Celts were fighters and might easily force a draw, and that would be another coupon up the pole. Gees, it was difficult, an exquisite labour. Hibs to win against St. Mirren at home? Queen's Park to pull it off against Aberdeen away? The longer Danny pondered, the more confused did his mind seem to become, the more incapable of decision.

After an hour of it he pushed the paper away with a sigh. Thus it was every Thursday evening in the season. To-morrow, he knew, most of his doubts would be resolved with the aid of the evening paper he bought on that day alone. But this Thursday agony was for him a necessary part of the ritual of the week, and he rose from it with the feeling of virtuous effort duly made.

He put out a hand and pulled the absorbed Billy's hair. "Come on, son. Off to yer beddy-baw. Ye'll read yerself blind."

Unwillingly the child clambered from the chair, yawned, and shuffled moodily towards the door that led into the next room. As it closed behind him the thin girn of the baby sounded from behind the curtains. "Wheesht!" said Danny softly. "Wheesht, you!"

The cry was stilled for a moment, then it began again,

unassertive but persistent. The father moved stealthily to the curtain, slipped behind them, and in the gloom of the cubicle started to croon to the infant, stroking at the same time the back of a silken-soft hand. But still she did not cease to whimper. Then the whimper became a cry. Then the small lump of humanity was transformed into a shrieking, kicking nexus of passion, and at that unmistakable sign Danny admitted to himself the nature of the crisis.

He was at the fire, the child on his knees, sponged and happy again, and he was in the act of wrapping a dry, warm napkin about the loins with sure, practised hand, when there shambled into the room a gawky lad of sixteen or thereabouts. His large tweed cap of aggressive pattern was still down over his suspicious eyes, and there was a half-smoked cigarette behind one ear. His shoulders were round, his feet dragged. But though he had an air of uneasy truculence, there was yet about him the pathetic, frustrated air of a boy.

That latter aspect of his son Danny could not see. The mere sight of the shuffling halfin had the power to infuriate him, since it symbolised all that he hated, that he could not understand: idleness, flashiness of mind and habit, stupidity. Only the baby on his knees prevented an outburst.

“So ye’re home?” he said, roughly sarcastic.

“Looks like it,” retorted Peter in his grumbling voice.

“My God!” stormed Danny, so violently that the child started in his arms. “I’ll clatter ye one of these days, ye great, useless keelie.”

“Ach, shut up, for crivvens sake!” the boy pleaded. “Give’s half a chance. Did ma mother leave me ma tea?”

Danny laid the baby on the bed and drew the curtains.

“Leave ye yer tea!” he cried. “Come for yer tea when ye know it’s ready and ye’ll get it. Ye can dam’ well make yer tea for yersel’ if ye want it. And what’s more, my lad, ye’ll stay in here the rest of the night and look after the weans. I’m goin’ out. D’ye hear?”

“Och, I hear ye all right, all right.”

In a fume, Danny found his jacket and waistcoat and cap. While he dressed he glowered at the boy, now busy with the kettle at the sink. Always appalled by what he believed to be Peter’s shifleness, now he was infuriated by the lad’s apparent indifference to criticism. Fine men

they were breeding nowadays ! he reflected sardonically. Tarts and fags ; dancing and betting—that was about their limit. A lot of work-shy young twisters. Another war, with conscription, would do them a sight of good.

"I'll be back about ten," Danny said finally. "And don't you stir a foot out this door or I'll lam the skin off yer backside."

Having made this last, somewhat desperate declaration of a father's authority, Danny went out into a street that was filling with an autumn fog. He packed and lit his pipe as he went and, having reached the Dumbarton Road, turned eastwards along it at a pace unusually brisk for him.

His wonted cheerfulness returned to answer the challenge of the busy streets ; he delighted, though not consciously, in the life about him : the laughter of young people, the cosy respectability of married couples out for a stroll, the lighted shops, and the colours of the trams. About Partick Cross he paused to witness an interesting ejection from a public house. In a side-street near Byres Road a noisy speaker on behalf of the National Unemployed Workers' Movement was hoarsely proclaiming Communism to a quiet, if occasionally facetious, knot of people. There was a blaze of light from the façade of the Kelvin Hall, then housing, so Danny gathered with interest, a Radio Exhibition. He had always had a fancy to buy a set.

At the form of the roads he bore to the right up Argyle Street, and about three hundred yards along turned into the tunnel of an archway running under a lofty tenement. This led him into a dimly-lit yard that ramified in the most surprising ways—here to a stable where a baker kept his horses, that way to the premises of a firm astonishingly advertising itself as "Wood Turners and Bagpipe Makers," the other to the styes of "John Tolmie, Pigfeeder."

It was a veritable hamlet in the heart of Glasgow, a nook in which primitive and unexpected avocations were busily pursued. It smelt of the country, of base-feeding, coarse-mannered animals. Its buildings were white-washed. It seemed to defy the city that had grown about it, a hardy relic, as indeed it was, of the days when the Anderston corks, as the merchant-weavers of the village were called, had their villas and gardens and coach-houses hereabouts in the brave days of Glasgow's first industrial expansion. The house that Danny approached through the pend and up a short lane was actually the stable and

coachman's dwelling of a long-dead nabob, whose heirs had sold everything to the railway company so that a tunnel might be driven underneath.

A yelping of dogs answered his pull at the contraption of wires which opened the great gate of this establishment. That would be Cloonagh of Rathnahuna and Brackenburn Bailie, the greyhounds young Alston, the bookie's son, kept boarded here. (So they weren't racing at the White City to-night.) Danny silenced the nervous, cringing beasts with a word, and they slunk off into the darkness before him. Up an old wooden staircase he passed to the door of the antique house above their kennels.

A child answered his knock.

"Hello, Tommy! Is your father in?"

A woman, smiling, appeared behind the little boy.

"Oh, it's you, Danny! Come in," she greeted him. "He's in his bed, but he's feeling not too bad to-day." She turned to call indoors: "Here's Danny, Joe."

A weak voice answered from the back of the room.

"Bring him in. Come in, Dan."

The room was lit only by a paraffin-lamp on the mantelpiece and the flames of a goodly fire beneath it, but it had a bright cosiness that went to Danny's heart. Every ornament and utensil was polished to the nines, and all were arranged to produce an effect of easy orderliness. Deal tables and chairs were scrubbed white, the iron fender gleamed in the firelight, and if ever there had been a soiled or discarded object in the house it had been tidied out of sight.

"Ye're fine and perjink here, Jess," remarked Danny approvingly to his hostess, who smiled with pleasure. He marched up to the bed in the corner and held out his hand. "And how's things, Joe?"

He looked down on a pale and sunken face, that of the ghost of a man. A thin arm came from under the patchwork coverlet, a damp and feeble hand rested for a moment in his.

"Not so bad, Danny, not so bad," the weak voice replied. "The cough's been easier the day."

"That's fine, Joe. That's grand. I'll be up to take ye out a walk one of these days soon."

He always said that, but it had become an automatic and meaningless encouragement. He had long seen death in Joe Stirling's eyes, and he knew its inevitability to be accepted by Jess and Joe as well as by himself. They

were three who shared a deadly secret and defied it in the sweet understanding of their friendship. Joe was one of the finest things in Danny's life since, like Leslie Pagan, he was of that period in which Danny had lived most richly. And Christ ! it was hard to think that after passing quite unscathed through the battles and rigours of Gallipoli, Sinai and Palestine, Joe had been caught at last by the German gas in March, 1918, and was now this rotting invalid, dying on an Army pension.

He sat for an hour by the bedside and told Joe his news. He went through the story of the launch of the *Estramadura* ; he told Joe how he thought of framing his coupon, gravely and elaborately justifying his probable choice of winning teams. Joe listened in silence, but his eyes were brightly attentive.

"I wish I could see a game again, Danny," he whispered once.

"You'll see a game again all right, Joe, ma son," asserted Danny stoutly. "Wait you till after the New Year. . . ."

Joe smiled patiently, and Danny hurried on to canvass the prospects for the great International at Hampden in the spring, that fantastic peak of the Scotsman's football year, when the army of spectators assembles more than a hundred thousand strong and roars to the fluctuations of the fight against the ancient enemy of England. Then Jess brought the tea she had made, and Danny drank four strong cups of it while they chatted of this and that.

"And how are a' yer folk, Danny?" Jess asked him conversationally. "Has Peter got a job yet?"

"They're a' right, thanks, Jess," returned Danny. "But Peter ! Get a job ! He wouldna' walk round the corner to get one."

"Ach, ye're too hard on him, Dan," she pleaded kindly. "A job's no' easy to come by these days. He's just like a' the rest—he canna help himself."

"By God, he just won't !" insisted Danny vehemently. "Jazzin' and the Pictures and wenchin'—that's about the size of him. He's in wi' a lot of work-shy young twisters that should be put into the Army and have some guts knocked into them."

"It's no' so easy as a' that, I doubt," she insisted gently. "It's gey hard times we're living in."

"Aye, but that's no' an excuse."

He could not, however, press the argument with Jess beyond that point, for her generosity defeated him. When

he had left the house, promising to be back on Monday to report on Saturday's football to Joe, he went homewards along Argyle Street with the influence of his friend's wife much upon him. The comforting kindness of her remained with him, a stimulant more potent than drink; and because it had come from a woman so good, and herself so much the victim of circumstance, he gave unaccustomed weight to what she had said about the bad times and the ill-luck of young men born into them.

Perhaps there was something to be said for Peter, after all; and for a space the father's love, that had been inverted, turned to flow outwards to his gawky, foolish son. And he remembered suddenly the Yard and the state of affairs in it and what Leslie Pagan had said to him when they parted near the road-junction at Scotstoun. Bad, bad times—there was no getting away from that.

Danny felt then the need of company and, at the same moment, of time to think; and here was the Glenclober Vaults, which he knew well as a pub of the quieter sort. On the top of his supper and Jess's tea a wee one would do him no harm. Hard times, repeated something within him, and harder times coming; but his consciousness reacted desperately to that mean intimidation, and he turned into the bar.

3

It was quiet in there, only two small groups of men at the counter and an old, decayed woman sipping hot rum in the bogus privacy of a compartment. The barman nodded familiarly and talked about the weather while he served Danny with his half and half-pint. No fresh customers came in, and while Danny drank, they chatted emptily, the barman's elbows on the counter, discussing in the aimless fashion of such encounters this, that, and the other until they came, inevitably, to the subject of football.

It was then that the barman suddenly deserted his professional manner. He leaned forward over the counter, winked, nudged his head ever so slightly, and indicated three men who stood talking with intensity some three yards away—two large Jews in neat, waisted overcoats and a lad in shabby serge clothes with a kindly sheepish face.

"Know who that is?" the barman asked portentously and, at Danny's shake of the head, explained: "Packy Doonan, the featherweight. That's his manager, the big fella wi' the grey hat. The other's the manager of the Arena. He's a great wee fighter that."

Danny was impressed. He had the genuine feeling of being in the presence of greatness. Packy Doonan—that wee chap looking so gentle and simple; just a laddie not much older than Peter!

"Like to speak to him?" asked the barman, glorying in his triumph.

"Sure," said Danny, impressed and yet apprehensive.

"Wait till I get a chance," explained the barman.

He moved with an air of unconcern towards the group of three, halted near them, humming an air with laboured indifference, and at the first sign of a glass nearly empty darted forward with napkin poised to wipe the counter and a face expectant of another order. He got it—two large whiskies for the Jews, a baby soda, and a small tonic for Packy.

For Danny it was joyous agony to watch the play. As he served the drinks the barman called out to him, as if the pressure of business was heavy that night: "Just a minute, Danny, till I serve these gents. Won't be a sec."

Danny shivered with delight to see the larger of the Jews turn massively to survey him.

"Perhaps your friend would have one with us?" he suggested in a slow and heavy voice.

The transaction had been completed just before Danny knew where he was. He was overwhelmed, and yet something within him preserved a detachment, in which he saw himself shaking hands respectfully with the ponderous and equable Jews, vigorously with the grinning pugilist.

"And yours, sir?" boomed the larger Jew; then to the barman: "The usual for our friend, Tom."

It was a situation in which all his cheerfulness and independence of spirit deserted Danny. He was reassured by the simplicity, the childishness, of Packy Doonan, but the big men were too much for him. Ike Harris, one of the biggest men in the game, and Joe Silver of the Arena! Life was wonderful, but overpowering. This would be something to tell the boys in the Yard to-morrow. This would impress Peter with a real sense of his father's importance. He scratched in his mind for something to contribute to the talk and could find little that did not

sound empty when expressed. But the marvel of it was that the big men seemed to expect nothing of him but that he should drink at their expense and listen.

He had three drinks with them and heard many marvellous stories, tales of famous fights of the past that he had only read about and these wonderful men had actually seen, exposures of the erratic private lives of great men he had worshipped from afar, and revelations of huge sums of money made and lost in this business of entertaining a public devoted to sport. And in this magnificent sublimation of a profound instinct Danny found forgetfulness of problems that were beginning, subtly but uncomfortably, to beset him.

When they parted outside the public-house just before closing time there began to dawn on him uncomfortably the feeling that he had not, after all, counted for much in the gathering. Packy's grin and firm shake of the hand were flattering, but the Jews waved only casual farewells, gestures that patently ignored his individuality, and hurried towards an approaching tram with their valuable charge. Still, it had been a great experience, something that had lifted the day far out of the ruck of days. His heart was high as he walked homewards; and "Ach, to hell!" he valiantly said to himself when a lurch into a passer-by let him know that he had drunk a little more than was good for him.

The tides of people flowing backwards and forwards along the Dumbarton Road delighted him. It was fine to see folks out and about, he thought: lads and their lassies, decent middle-aged and elderly couples making home from the Pictures, and bold files of girls abreast, many a bonny piece among them.

The warmth of the human bond was astonishing. What was it Rabbie had said, speaking for the people? That bit about honest poverty and the guinea-stamp—a man's a man for a' that. And Rab, by God, was right! Folks were decent if you looked at them the right way: all plain bodies like himself, a wee bit misunderstood, but cheerfully going home along the Dumbarton Road to their decent beds. Danny began to think of Agnes. He was humming, almost singing, "The Lea Rig" as he turned off towards Kingarth Street.

Even down there towards the River there were people about on this quite remarkable night, people getting home, people coming away from the firesides of friends. Many

a window glowed with the light of hospitality behind it. Every close held its silent, locked couple or its crooning group of boys and girls. From one came the unmistakable voice of his own son, Peter. The lad was nasally intoning one of those mournful songs of negroid love in which he delighted ; and as he passed the lighted mouth of the close Danny saw his first-born, shoulders hunched, hands in pockets, shuffling a dance for the entertainment of his friends.

A spasm of the old anger seized him. His kindly feeling towards the world at large changed suddenly to a black contempt for that one young man—messing about with his fancy molls. And he had left the house against explicit orders. Gees ! It was Danny's impulse to step into the close, seize his son by the scruff of the neck, and drag him home. Then there came, like a wave of warm comfort, the thought that Agnes must have returned early, and he passed on to his own doorway.

He halted at the entrance to the kitchen, amazed. The gas was burning bright, the fire still glowed, but Agnes was not there. Instead, he saw only Bill, in his shirt-tails, holding aside the curtains of the bed and staring in horror at something that lay there, screaming.

Danny leapt forward. The infant on the bed had twisted its body into a fantastic shape ; its face was a livid purple. He snatched her up.

"How long has she been crying ?" he snapped at Billy.

"She wakened me," the boy replied, afraid.

"When did Peter go out ?"

"I don't know, pa."

"My Christ !" hissed Danny, tearing at the baby's clothes. "Away to yer bed, son. Away and sleep. She's all right now."

He worked rapidly on the child. She had quietened now. He had come just in time. Needing attention, she had cried for it ; and getting none, had taken to screaming and throwing herself about, so that the neckband of her nightgown had tightened about her throat. A near thing it had been, but babies were like that. For the second time that evening he patiently performed the rites of cleaning.

He was about at an end when Agnes returned. There was colour in her face, her eyes were bright, and it struck him even then that she was pretty and desirable in her tight-fitting blue hat, her coat with deep fur collar, and her trig shoes.

"What's wrong, Dan?" she asked, as if the cries of the child still echoed somehow about the room.

He told her, and she snatched up the infant, held its face to hers, and crooned to it.

"It's that useless lump, Peter," growled Danny. "Leavin' the bairn alone like that! When I told him, too! My God, I'll skin the backside off him when I get him."

But Agnes did not seem to be listening. She was laying the baby back in the bed, crowing foolish things to it. Then she drew the curtains, threw her hat and coat upon the table, and sat down on a chair before the fire.

"My, I've had a grand night!" she sighed.

He saw that she was excited, a good deal above herself. The nagging woman of the house had disappeared, and the girl had come to life again. Patiently he listened to her story. It had been a lovely picture, then she had gone in with Lizzie on the way home and had three wee ports.

"I'm just about tight, Dan," she giggled. "I bet you are too."

With that she drew her skirts above her knee and stretched her toes towards the fire.

"How's that for a leg?" she asked.

His heated senses responded to the challenge, and soon they were in bed together beside Wee Mirren, the queer hazards of the life about them all forgotten.

CHAPTER THREE

A SHIPYARD CLOSES

THE portfolio lay open on one of the low tables of Blanche's chromium-plated lounge. Before it, in an attitude that the detached observer would have recognised as dutiful, sat Leslie Pagan. His father paced the old gold carpet, backwards and forwards before the fire, a Turkish cigarette between his gesticulating fingers.

"Beautiful stuff, my dear boy, beautiful!" the old man expatiated. "Old Jack had devilish fine taste. I'll say that for him, but he never thought in 1920 I'd be buying his stuff at auction in 1930. Ha! Ha! He never thought that. No, by Gad! A big pile in Army contracts he made. Too much. There was that committee of enquiry.

But he got away with it. And now, broke to smithereens, the dam' fool, monkeying about with currencies. And I get that portfolio of his there for, for—what was it?—a couple of hundred! And look at it, boy! Look at that Bone. No, not the Zorn. Nasty man, Zorn, and a cheap-jack. Yes, that one. And the Cameron. Superb, eh? Superb. Now if you turn over, there's an engraving by a fellow, name of Gooden. Don't know the name, but he's good, devilish good, eh? Thought I'd like to give Blanche her pick."

"Nonsense, father. You keep the whole shooting-match and enjoy them."

"Thinking you'll get them later on?" the old man twinkled.

"Thinking nothing," Leslie laughed. "Have a drink. Where are the drinks? Touch the bell, father, would you. . . . As for later on, there'll be none if trade doesn't hurry up and improve," he concluded glumly.

"Trade!" The old man waved an ugly interruption aside. "I thought we were talking about prints—and drinks."

"The drinks are coming, and I've seen the prints, and I'll see them again," said Leslie lightly enough. He knew that nowadays he must humour his father in any discussion that was really grave. "But if you want to know the truth, I brought you here to talk business, and you're going to do it. Now, look here, dad. . . ."

"My dear boy——" the old man began to protest.

A knock and the entrance of a maid checked him, and Leslie was quick to rise and move to the tray the girl put down on a table near the door. He held up a decanter invitingly.

"Sherry—the Tio Pepe? Or is it too dry?" he asked.

"Nothing could be too dry if you insist on talking business." Old John Pagan would have his little joke.

"I don't insist, dad—good luck to you!—it forces itself upon me. We've got to pay off a lot of men or go on losing a lot of money. That's what it comes to, and you've got to decide."

The old man sipped his sherry.

"Charming! Not everybody's taste, but charming!" he murmured approvingly. "But this is surely nonsense, Leslie. A big pay-off?"

"A very big pay-off," answered his son remorselessly, "A fortnight since we launched the *Estramadura* and not

a blessed sign of anything—not even an old tramp for repair. The riggers and the carpenters and that lot are all right on the fitting-out job, but we just can't go on letting gangs of constructional men kick their heels about the place—platers and riveters and so on. Much as I'd like to."

The old man paused in his striding, then lowered himself into a deep chair by the fire.

"Pagan's have always tried to be decent about that sort of thing," he said, grave for the moment. "And work will come along soon, you'll see."

"Will it? I wish I could think so."

He was full of the awareness of a bitter paradox inherent in this situation of the two men responsible for Pagan's unwilling to make the gesture of defeat, but for reasons totally different. He knew that an ancient pride in the Yard, a faith in the holy destiny of the Clyde was alone what kept his father from making the melancholy admission that the brave days were gone. He had himself passed that point already, and his tenderness was all for the men—and quite irrational in the grey philosophy of commerce.

"Leave it for a day or two," the old man said, rather helplessly for him.

"And we can't. This is Wednesday. Friday's another pay-day."

It was to their relief that the door swung open then to admit Blanche, her fairness glowing against a foundation of black velvet, milky pearls gleaming at her neck.

"Hullo! Hullo! Hullo!" she greeted them. "All very grave and reverend. What's wrong?"

The old man stood up beside her at the fire and put his arm round her waist.

"Your husband has lost his nerve," he whispered playfully. "He's going to hand Pagan's to the broker's men."

The pleasantry was like a knife running into Leslie, though he exonerated father and wife from every charge of malice aforethought. A fine, friendly pair they made: she so handsome and so frank with her elderly beau, and he in his turn so courteous and so distinguished in his dinner-jacket of dark purple and his deep stock. Yet their amiable juxtaposition had for the man who watched them an implication of fearful irony. He knew absolutely of both what these two could only dimly guess about each other—that the passing of Pagan's would be death for the

old man, that it would be for her, weary at heart of this drab Scotland that could not give her the life she craved, a release unspeakable.

Did Blanche apprehend the strain that was upon him? Certainly her tone seemed to him harsh with nervousness.

"And am I not to have a cocktail?"

The thread of tension snapped. A family joke came to their rescue. Blanche was smiling mischievously even before the old man broke out vehemently.

"A cocktail! Great Heavens, girl, *must* you ruin your palate and your constitution with these poisonous things? Gall and wormwood—a nasty mess of beastly raw spirit and Italian syrups! Nasty——"

She grinned over the frosted glass she had raised to him.

"Dear daddy!" she cooed. "I love that piece of yours. And here's to your blue eyes."

"I'd prefer to have it in decent clean sherry, my girl, but I know you're incorrigible, and that Leslie can't manage you properly. And who is coming to-night to share the poisons with you? Anybody interesting?"

"Oh, just a fragment of the Family."

"The Family—yes, the Family. I begin to see just how much use I am to you, my dear girl—handy old fellow to have about at your duty dinners." He sat down with a sigh. "And what particular type of infliction am I to endure to-night?"

"Cheer up, daddy!" she laughed at him. "Only Aunt Margaret and Alasdair. And there will be some nice people coming in later."

"Dear me! Oh, dear me!" sighed the old man.

"I like young Alasdair," she challenged him.

"The trouble is, dear," Leslie interrupted, "that it's impossible to separate him from Aunt Margaret."

"A dreadful woman," observed old John Pagan. "She killed poor Tom."

"Daddy!"

Even as they spoke they heard the tyres of a heavy car crisp over the gravel as the visitors rolled up to the front door; and a minute later they were receiving with every sign of cordiality the wife of Leslie's uncle and her son.

She was a woman in her sixties, elaborately bejewelled, the powder thick and grey on her broad and heavy face—"uncomfortably like a bulldog," old John Pagan once had described her. The son was in the nature of an item of her luggage. Rather short and slight, with uninteresting

hair and a moustache that might as well have not existed, he did not even get from his dinner-jacket the spurious distinction that garment confers on most men.

Mrs. Thomas Pagan's greetings were decisive. It was as if she had come knowing precisely what she meant to say. She refused a glass of sherry and was palpably interested in a faintly disapproving way when Alasdair accepted a cocktail. She was ready with her answer to Blanche's formal question.

"We have been wonderfully well, my dear," she intimated, "wonderfully well. Alasdair has been golfing regularly, and I have been taking a very helpful course of massage. Very helpful. But of course I can't winter in this place—simply can't. So I'm off to London next week. Then I go to Spezia in January."

"Alasdair too?" Leslie could not help asking.

Her formidable eyes swung to take his as if she had scented an impertinent challenge.

"Certainly," she said, closing every avenue to a possible discussion. From Leslie, as if contemptuously, she turned to her brother-in-law. "And how is the business, John?"

The old man made a faintly protesting gesture with a thin hand.

"So, so," he answered. "It is like every other business just now, Margaret; it could be a good deal better. In fact, we've got to face the possibility of closing down. Temporarily, of course, temporarily."

"That would be nonsense," pronounced Aunt Margaret.

Leslie watched his father's face at that moment. Then he glanced at Blanche. The irony, the perfect irony of it! Then, as a maid appeared at the door with a word for Blanche, came the old man's astringent response.

"It is likewise nonsense, my dear Margaret, to keep on paying wages to scores of workmen when there is nothing for them to do."

"Come on, good people!" Blanche cut in. "Dinner. No shop to-night, please."

And, after a laborious gathering of bag and handkerchief, Aunt Margaret took old John Pagan's arm and swept before them across the hall.

It was such a dinner as Blanche invariably provided especially for her father-in-law—cup of consomme, *sole au vin blanc*, pheasant, and a soufflé of cheese as light as air. A glass of Montrachet with the perfume of violets in it, the Corton of '21, and black coffee—everything chosen to

fit the taste of an exigent old gentleman, and no concessions to such as Aunt Margaret.

Food was indeed not an interest with that forceful lady. She had many decisive things to say in her spirit of command over the section of life she had chosen for her own, and she said them; so that though she was at his elbow and he had a hospitable duty to her, Leslie could retire into that hinterland of detachment he had come to know so well of late and from it regard the small drama played by the company round the table that returned reflections from mahogany and silver of the shaded lamp above.

It was a fantastic group as he studied it, its constituents so strangely interdependent. There sat his own father, the long tradition of Pagan's embodied, but ready now in age to forget responsibility; the elegant veteran. There was Aunt Margaret, limited and endlessly assertive, a parasite on Pagan's, living on money made out of Pagan's, still drawing money its men laboured to earn. Alasdair? A Scotsman spoiled—Uppingham and Oriel, with a small book of undergraduate essays to his credit; and a parasite at second-hand, overlain by his mother, living on her, and through her, on Pagan's—so useless in Leslie's stern conception of a man's job that he almost disliked the harmless boy. And at the head of the table Blanche—radiant, agreeable, but making no more, he knew, than the best of a bad job among his relations and far from her own people. She could not care for Pagan's; she could not know what it meant, and must long in her heart to take him and John away from its power. For all of them, whether they knew it or not, destiny was in the fate of Pagan's; and he—Leslie Patullo Pagan—he must, apparently, decide what that fate should be.

"What were you saying about the Yard, John," he started out of his reverie to hear Aunt Margaret pronounce, "is most disturbing. Most disturbing."

"A mere matter of business, my dear Margaret," the old man muttered, and glanced an appeal at Blanche, who, rising, answered it promptly.

"Shall I send in more coffee, Lal?" she asked with a superb assumption of casualness. "I think, Aunt Margaret . . ."

So they were spared, and with young Alasdair between father and son, there was little of reality in their talk until, with the outer door opening to arriving guests, they moved to join the growing company in the lounge.

There came Blanche's stand-by, Sir Archie, relic of one of Glasgow's merchant families, a bachelor and rich, infinitely decorated with the orders of the smaller nations, a repository of the West End's gossip, and endlessly indiscreet. There came the gossip-writer of an evening paper, a little dirty as to his linen, short-sighted, and elaborately cynical. The dark girl in the yellow dress was, Leslie knew, that daughter of a county family of Argyll who had achieved a reputation for courage in adversity by starting as hairdresser in Buchanan Street. He smiled to see old Sir Peter Cunningham, small, frail, porcelain-pallid, and tottering, but incalculably rich on oil. A young minister who had successfully dramatised his welfare work in the East End sparkled within a ring of pretty girls by the fire. Over Aunt Margaret there bent massively a Rugby Internationalist in kilt, red waistcoat, and lace cravat.

In their superficial aspects Leslie liked these gatherings that Blanche had the genius to convene. It pleased something elemental in him to hear such a crackle of lively talk under his own roof, to ply the guests with drinks. Blanche had created a colourful novelty in this grey city of the north. Others could gather folk to play Bridge or to endure the formalities of a musical evening, but to few other houses in all the great town would people come, as they came at Blanche's bidding, just to meet and talk. Even over Glasgow her superb Englishness had triumphed. He was proud of her.

Yet on this evening of his personal anxiety, and though he was pleased to know that the party went well, he could not lose himself in it altogether. These chattering people—some thirty of them—were not the recipients of a hospitality altogether disinterested. He hated himself for thinking so, but he could not get away from the profound knowledge that thus and thus did Blanche, by buying Glasgow with her wealth, seek to escape, however naturally, the dour reality of it. At one moment, while he was supposed to be in talk with Sir Peter's Miss Meiklejohn, the sour reflection occurred to him that the cost of this bright evening in hard cash would keep for a week five of such families as must suffer at once through the closing down of Pagan's. Even as he passed on to chat with the fashionable missionary of the East End there came over him a petulant wish to challenge the creature on the fantastic disproportion of human life.

He was still with the parson when a tug at his sleeve brought him round to face his father.

"I must go now, Leslie," the old man murmured.

"So soon, father?"

"Yes. Blanche is a wonderful hostess, but she doesn't budget for age."

"I'll see you out."

They were alone in the cloakroom, suddenly and surprisingly isolated from the rabble in the lounge. Father and son were together. The directors of Pagan's had met. And between them lay a problem unsolved.

"Are you to be at the office to-morrow?" Leslie asked.

He asked it innocently, but the question's implication dawned on him at once, and he was glad then that he had put it. The old man carefully arranged the white silk scarf about his neck.

"I don't think so," he said. "No, I don't think so. Is my car at the door?"

He led the way into the hall; then paused there as if in abstraction, his eyes downcast, his black felt hat in his hand.

"This is Wednesday," he mused. "Two days till Friday. Dear me! Dear me!"

He raised his eyes to take Leslie's. They were gentle, faintly quizzical, yet grave in their challenge.

"It's your decision, son," he said. "I'm too old now. Good-night."

As the front door opened to let him out, so did the door of the lounge, and the chatter of the people in there came to Leslie's ears like the first blast of a rising and ominous gale.

As he moved from the boardroom back into the small office he preferred to call his own, he was conscious of the eyes of clerks and typists upon him. This sense of uneasiness seemed to have pervaded the counting house of Pagan's since, at twenty minutes after nine, he had hauled Jimmy, the office boy, over the coals for forgetting to alter the date on the calendar. Had he so openly displayed the fretfulness that possessed him? Certainly he might have been less irritable with Miss Macgregor because she had more than once asked him to repeat a hurried sentence in dictation. They had good reason to wonder at the tantrums of a boss usually quiet and tolerant.

But there was more than that. They knew. They could not help knowing. All the yard and shop managers and sub-managers were not called at once to meet the managing director in the boardroom for nothing. They must have noticed how grave were the faces of the men as they passed out from the interview. Pagan's closing down—it was in the air ; it would be all over the yard and well into Glasgow by five o'clock.

It had been damnable. His irritation and his unwonted ferocity were the measure of the effort he had had to make to bring himself to do it. To sit alone in the big boardroom, waiting for them, had been a misery. He had sat there for five minutes, staring at the half-models in their cases on the walls, thinking of the good and beautiful ships that Pagan's had sent down the River to the sea in ninety years of sail and steam, wondering—as if the thought came fresh to him—that this northern River, of all the rivers in the world, had cradled such a superb and mighty flotilla. Then the men had come, quietly, their dusty bowler hats in their hands. Decent, competent men, they faced patiently the fate they knew to be ineluctable.

He had taken their views, as he could do without presumption or suspicion of arrogance ; and one by one each of these born builders of ships said that he saw nothing else for it. They were Scots, taught by birth and training to weigh facts justly, and neither sentiment nor regret nor self-pity could affect their judgment. There must be a closing down. Perhaps things would get better. But the Yard could not stay open with only one ship fitting-out and nothing to fill the berths that lay empty to the sky, the gantries like blackened skeletons above them.

It had been easy, too easy. They were too damnably reasonable, these quiet men in blue serge suits. Leslie almost wanted from them a demonstration to justify his own unhappiness. But they subscribed in few words to a plain proposition, made no speeches, and trooped out to their jobs. Only old Alec Flett, fifty-three years, man and boy, with Pagan's, lingered behind to shake hands. He said not a word, however ; only his wet eyes betrayed the fact that tragedy had come to him in his old age.

Well, it was done, the decision made. The people in the office knew by now. Already it would be running through the drawing-office. Some sub-manager could be counted on to tell it in the Yard, and so they would all know. It was almost with relief that Leslie sighed. Then

he rang for Miss Macgregor and told her to send Mr. Dakers to him.

The secretary-accountant of the firm came eagerly, as it seemed. A scraggy man with a small mean face and rimless eyeglasses, he patently rejoiced in his contacts with authority and struggled always to display an easy acceptance of heavy responsibility shared. Leslie revolted from the first sight of that smug, alert countenance.

"We're closing down, Dakers," he said abruptly.

"Yes, I thought we would have to," the man replied. "In fact, I was going to speak to you about it."

"Oh, were you?" Leslie was in no mood to humour nonentities subtly assuming familiarity. "Well, it's done now. Better get the notices out. Tell the cashier's department. All the arrangements—you'll know what to do."

"I know," said Dakers, a faint note of pride in efficiency and foresight creeping into his tone. "In fact, I've prepared——"

"Well, go and get it done," Leslie was ruthless now. "But I want to see the lists of the men affected. There are a few I may keep on."

"Is that quite wise, Mr. Leslie?"

"Oh, go to hell, Dakers, and do what you're told!"

And no sooner had the door closed than he was sorry and ashamed. It was absurd and humiliating to give way thus to temper. This was no way to face a crisis. Yet was it not the strain of the crisis that caused the irritability? And yet again. . . . He wondered for a little if he was ill. It was all strange and puzzling. Staring at the green blotting-pad before him, he felt like something in a trap.

He was roused from his uneasy reverie by a knock and the entrance of Miss Macgregor with a sheaf of letters to sign. Ah! Something to do. Not that the letters seemed to matter much now. But life did have to go on. It was the break in the continuity of things that he was really resenting. The letters were welcome.

"I'll sign these at once, Miss Macgregor. Don't expect I'll be in this afternoon."

He read the sheets with quite unusual care, clinging to the illusion of normality. He had no faith within him in such of the letters as answered enquiries, forwarded estimates, or otherwise related to future business. To a surrender of all that he had contrived to brace himself; it was done with, and he did not wish to think about it.

But it was something to have on hand this little job of reading, altering a punctuation mark here and there, and putting down his signature on behalf of the firm. He was very conscious of the small manicured hand of Miss Macgregor resting on the edge of the desk before him, the diamonds glistening from a ring on the third finger.

"Is the marriage fixed yet, Miss Macgregor?" he asked lightly, though still apparently absorbed.

"Oh, yes, thanks, Mr. Leslie!" Miss Macgregor was surprised. "In the Spring some time—April, I expect."

"That's fine. We mustn't forget that."

"Thanks very much, Mr. Leslie."

She gathered the letters and went out, neat and quiet. No hope of confidences from that quarter. Miss Macgregor knew her place. Miss Macgregor had her own little life all nicely arranged and had no time for light conversation with a superior at a loose end. And why should she? But his little failure to touch her humanity made him feel dreadfully alone.

Slowly, doubting just what he would do next, he put on his hat and coat. It was his custom to lunch with the others in the canteen, but now, not out of fear but from a haunting sense of futility, he thought of the daily ritual as unbearable. The Club? A horde of old gentlemen grumbling about the state of trade over Cockburn '08 in the dining-room. Then it occurred to him with the force of an inspiration that he might go home, surprising Blanche and John, and his mind leapt to accept a distracting decision.

The big house seemed empty when he reached it. Ringing for a maid, he found that Blanche was out and would not be back until the evening—gone to golf at Turnberry, the girl understood. But yes, Master John was back from school and at play in the day nursery; this was the early day at Miss Taggart's establishment.

"He'll lunch with me; then, Lizzie," said Leslie. "I suppose it can be ready by one."

John was on his stomach on the carpet before the nursery fire, his elbows propping his head, his whole self lost in a book. In a deep chair near at hand his nurse sat sewing. Neither made any marked acknowledgment of Leslie's entrance. It was John's way to be completely absorbed by whatever took his fancy to do, but Leslie's prejudice rose against the distant insolence of the girl, her immobility confessing faith in her own divine right of control within this room.

"John is lunching with me to-day, Nannie," he said. "Hullo, John! Not going to say how-do, you old sausage? There you are. What about an adventure this afternoon?"

"Where to, daddy?"

It was fine to get that eager response.

"Mrs. Pagan's instructions were that John was to go to the Botanic Gardens this afternoon."

"I'll take the responsibility. Please bring him down to the lounge when his hands are washed."

Lunch with John was an adventure for both of them. Only at midday dinner on Sundays did Blanche suffer him to appear at the family table, and then in austere conditions, and it was grand to have this stolen chance of being with the child in intimacy, of seeing how he was growing out, of searching for his confidence. How little one can ever know about a child! Leslie reflected. And what queer corners there are in the mind of any one of them! Gravity and rough fun; curiosity and strange indifferences—ravishing compounds!

This day the mood of fun prevailed between them. John was not very good with knife and fork, and Leslie laughed to see how he sawed fecklessly with the one at his cutlet and used the other as a species of spoon. Himself, he pretended extreme discomfort in eating, making large rude noises and strange faces, while John laughed and laughed almost to the point of choking. It was a great and delicious secret between them when Leslie let the child have two chocolates out of a special box kept by Blanche on the sideboard.

"And where shall we go to-day, old son?" Leslie asked at length.

"Edinburgh Zoo," answered John promptly.

"Too far, and it'll be dark too soon. Would you like a surprise?"

"Yes, a surprise! Where?"

"But it's a surprise, so you've got to wait and see. Run upstairs and tell Nannie to get you ready—plenty of clothes on, too. It's a big surprise, and you mustn't get cold."

In due course John took his seat in the waiting Riley but there were many things he had to have explained before they started off. The red tell-tale light on the dashboard attracted him first of all. Then it occurred to him to speculate on the operation of four-wheel brakes and very seriously to doubt the capacity of a single pedal

to motivate front and rear brakes simultaneously. The working of the speedometer had to be explained to him, and as they turned down the drive they were deep in a discussion of the steering-gear's peculiar activities.

Leslie found himself absurdly happy, explaining. It was simply a joy to hear the toneless "Oh!" of John in the act of imbibing knowledge. With a pang he realised that the child had never before sat by the driver of a car, but had always been tucked away, something at once precious and negligible, in the back seat of the big Daimler. And he was an engineer born, a proper Pagan, not merely wanting to know why in the way of any child, but to know exactly why. The "Oh!" was the reward only of an explanation completely detailed. It was a complete satisfaction to give that young mind the food it hungered for, and there was a delicious flavour in the consciousness of the fact that their outing was an escapade stolen from life as by custom ordained.

Speeding down the Dumbarton Road, he pointed out each shipyard as they passed its closed gates and told the boy of the great ships built here and there. It was his own first real discovery of the splendour of the story his family had lived for generations, and he wondered moodily if John would help to carry it on, or ever be allowed to do so. Again he told how, in the great days, there was not one of these yards but had two or three big ships a-building, so that up and down the River the bows of vessels unlaunched towered over the tenement buildings of the workers and people passing could hardly hear themselves speak for the clangour of metal upon metal that filled the valley from Old Kilpatrick up to Govan. The silence that reigned now made him afraid, and he reflected that Pagan's, after all, could count itself lucky in having carried on so long. For some of these yards were never to reopen again. It was written. The supreme glory had departed.

But it was all a raree-show for John, ecstatic beside him and surprisingly observant, noting how closely the Kilpatrick Hills pressed on the River; wanting to know how, if somebody wished to build a very, very big ship, it could be done without cutting a tunnel into these hills, and brooding with a toneless "Oh!" over the explanation that there were limits to the size of ships, let alone the fact that the canalized Clyde was narrow enough for the vessels its eident sons had built already. The question of tides held him till a turn off the main road took them down

to Renfrew Ferry and he was distracted by the monstrous pylons carrying the wires of the Grid across the River and by the antique vessel that took their car and hauled itself by chains across the stream, bumping in the wash of a City liner outward bound : a ship gigantic in the narrow channel, overtopping the houses along the banks.

"But where *are* we going, daddy?"

"Not long now, son," Leslie assured him and dropped into the homely idiom : "Just you wait."

It was with a boyish pride in the grandeur of his surprise that, five minutes later, he turned the car through the gates of the Aerodrome and ran her straight into the vast hangar of the aviation company, opening the door so that John might step out under the enormous wing of an Avro Ten.

Keenly he watched the boy's face and found there his reward. This was veritably wonderland. White aeroplanes of all sizes rested under the high span of the roof. Some stood, like birds resting, with their wings folded back. Others were being washed down, as it were lovingly, by women in white jackets and trousers. Two young mechanics, on ladders, were bent studiously over the engine of a small machine that had been wheeled into the light from one of the great doors. By the door at the other end of the hangar a squad was busy about a shining Dragon.

John had to see everything and was endlessly and surprisingly anxious about details : and Leslie was mildly astonished to realise how much of the new technique the child of the age could take for granted. He could himself remember the first of the motor cars, and here was an infant recognising easily, from his books, recondite types of plane—a Fox here, a Puss there, and some private person's ancient Spad in a corner.

They were very happy together, and Leslie's happiness was twofold. It was not only that John's absorption was complete and a reward for many of life's pains ; he loved himself these white birds of the air, the shapeliness of them, their pertness, their efficiency. Something fundamental in him was satisfied by the knowledge that not one of them could take the air unless its condition was perfect. He gloried in the thought—it was almost a feeling—of engines beautifully tuned, wires taut and controls adjusted to a hairbreadth. It was the stuff of his personal poetry.

The ground engineer superintending the squad by the Dragon hailed him cheerfully in bright Cockney.

“Afternoon, Mr. Pygan.”

“Afternoon, Bill. What’s wrong with the Dragon?”

“Overhaul. Tunin’ up now. This your boy? Here, Joe”—he called to a lad working in the cabin of the machine—“lift up the kid ’ere and show him the works.”

So John was cheerfully hoisted into the plane, and Leslie smiled to think of the boyishness of all who have to do with the air.

“Is she going out on test by any chance?” he asked Bill on a sudden impulse.

“Soon’s we’re ready. Jimmy Herring’s taking her.”

“I’ll pay for two passages. John”—he called through the door to the boy, proud in the pilot’s seat—“like to go up for a spin?”

“O-o-oh, daddy!” came a strained voice.

“That’s all right, Bill,” said Leslie. “I’ll see the people in the office.”

Recklessness had him in charge. Something at the back of his mind said that he should not do this thing, that it was somehow unfair to Blanche, but he could not stop now. He ached to give pleasure to John, his own son, for the afternoon; he wanted to liberate himself in this fantastic way. The late autumn sun was shining bright. There would be escape up there above the earth. There was nothing in it. . . .

The inevitable wait for the machine to be ready was galling. At once he completely approved and despised the long tests of the roaring engines. The mechanics seemed fools as they hopped about, doing odd finicking jobs at the last moment. “Get up! Get up!” he wanted to cry. “Put her nose in the air!”

They got off at last. ‘A slow, bumping run to the far end of the long field and a turn into the wind; a pause there to spin the motors once again; then the power went on, and she began to race over the ground. The turf streaked past. More power, more noise—Jimmy was giving her the gun. She rose. The streaking turf was below now. There came the queer feeling of being suspended at the end of an unbreakable rope of elastic. Up and up and up. Sometimes she shuddered, sagged, seemed to stumble. Now the earth was absurdly tilted towards the sky, and in momentary confusion Leslie looked to plot his universe by the block of buildings at the end of the ‘drome. He saw Jimmy Herring wave a reassuring

hand to John, and saw John wave back like any brother in arms.

John was all right, not a trace of apprehension about him. Leslie saw his intelligent young eyes now on the revolving petrol-gauges, then on the air-speed indicator. Nothing wrong with John : to this he had been born.

The plane steadied at last on her course some two thousand feet above Clydeside, and all that crowded realm lay below for all the world as if a child had laid it out on the nursery floor. Insects crawled along narrow ribbons—cars on the innumerable, quaintly intersecting roads. Houses were mere comic blocks set in silly rows ; the bunkers of a golf-course were rosy pock-marks on diseased skin. The great River itself had narrowed to a strip of lead and in Leslie's brooding eyes the gantries over the empty berths of the shipyards lining the banks from Dumbarton up to Glasgow seemed at once frivolous, pretentious, and pathetic.

The scene opened up as the machine sped westwards towards the Tail of the Bank. He could see in the enclosures of the Gareloch and the Holy Loch, small black marks on their silver surfaces, scores of ships laid-up, out of commission, paralysed. He saw with interest that two tramp steamers were a-building in Port Glasgow, but they stood out like monuments in the long range of silent yards. There was a C.P.R. liner at anchor off Greenock ; over all the wide expanse of the Firth he could see otherwise only a lighter puffing its pigmy way past the Cloch and a river-steamer crossing from Rothesay to Wemyss Bay.

But though it seemed as if the stagnation of the Clyde were being paraded by arrangement before his eyes, Leslie no longer felt the oppression of that consciousness upon him. The splendid frieze of the Cowal hills, the winter sunshine on them, held him with delight. There ahead were all the islands—green, water-studded Bute, the red and emerald of the Greater and the black of the Lesser Cumbrae, with Arran's peaks majestic in purple beyond. His eyes delighted in the silver filagree of lochs and kyles, and he exulted, a man escaping from an ominous shadow behind, in the easy rush of the plane through the sunshot air, in the creaming line of seawater round the horns of a remote and sandy bay, and in the rapture of John in the seat before him, his grave eyes on the swinging petrol-gauges.

They were above the steeples and red sandstone of

Largs when he became aware that Jimmy Herring was seeking to attract his attention. Contriving to get head and shoulders into the pilot's tiny cockpit he heard the shout :

"Had enough? She's going like a clock."

"Right, Jimmy!" he cried above the roar of the engines. "Home now."

And they headed inland then, the wings banking in the sweet poetry of a turn, passed over empty, brown moors, and in a few minutes were above the sprawl of Paisley again and circling down upon the landing-field.

As the machine bumped to rest before the hangar, Leslie got up and swung his son to earth with a happy flourish.

"And how was that, Johnny boy?" he asked eagerly.

"Oh, daddy?" he got his reward. "It was lovely, lovely!"

Then he coughed, a series of little dry barks, and Leslie, regarding him with sudden intensity, seemed to see him shiver.

"Are you cold, son?" he asked sharply.

"No. Only just a teeny little," the child confessed.

"Come along. Run for the car. You've got to get home, quick."

Twice on the road home John coughed, two brief spasms of that hard, small barking, and Leslie's heart was in his mouth. He ought to have seen to the boy's complete comfort. He ought to have remembered his disposition towards these sudden attacks on the chest. The shadow of a reckoning with Blanche closed down upon him.

"I've got to go back to the office, dear," he explained as they came over on the ferry, "but Burns will drive you straight home. Promise me to tell Nannie to give you a hot bath at once and a great big tea afterwards. Promise."

"Yes, daddy," said John obediently. Then : "Daddy!"

"Yes, John?"

"Does Jimmy Herring's aeroplane carry water to keep the engine cool? . . ."

It was seven o'clock before Leslie followed his son home. Blanche was alone in the lounge, apparently absorbed in the evening paper. She did not rise to greet him. She took his kiss almost mechanically, and guiltily he knew that the Thing had obtruded between them. She began coolly.

"You did not tell me that you were taking John up in a plane?"

"I didn't know myself until it occurred to me," he answered, laughing uneasily. "Sort of sudden inspiration. He liked it."

"And as a result," she continued relentlessly, "he's got another cold. He's got a temperature. He's coughing. I do think you might consult me about that sort of thing."

He thought of her at Turnberry, of John left alone with that hard English girl, and he wanted to fling the thought back, like a missile, in her withdrawn face. But the power of one unspoken word, the dreadful word pneumonia that they never exchanged but was always in their thoughts when John went down with one of his colds, thrust that meanness from his mind.

"I'm sorry, Blanche," he said, "ever so sorry. Can I see him?"

3

Leslie wakened on the Friday morning to see the fog down over Kelvinside. Shivering at the bedroom window, he could see only the tree-tops on the other side of the drive, ghostly scrolls of guarded boughs floating in the dank sea of mist. There was evidently little moving along the Great Western Road, for only once did he hear the clangour of a tramway bell; then a muffled rumble and silence. Far down the River a big ship's siren boomed dolcfully. The clatter of a milkboy's cans seemed to come from another world.

It was oppressive. Even at that early hour of the morning he felt that something evil portended, and he stood long at the window, held there by the paralysis of realising that indeed it was for him perhaps the worst day of all his life—John lying ill in the nursery along the passage—Pagan's closing down. John ill especially—he ached to know what sort of night the child had passed. Was Blanche still asleep?

"Getting up soon, dear?" he whispered hopefully through the twilight of the room.

"Just coming," her voice came clear. "And don't stand there shivering. Go and have your bath."

He went willingly, strangely relieved to feel that the house was alive once more, that the slow, negative interregnum of the night was over, and that they could not

keep him long now from news of John. He was quick to get through with the business of shaving and bathing, listening all the time for the sound of the nursery door opening to Blanche. When she came out again, he was quick to follow her back to their room.

"How is he?"

"A little better, I think." His heart leapt. "Nannie says he's not been coughing nearly so much. And I think he's not so fevered as he was. But we'll see when the doctor comes."

"Oh, good! I hope he comes early."

He could not bring himself to go to the Yard after breakfast, and to placate his conscience he fell back on all sorts of pretexts—the fog, the imminence of stagnation at Pagan's, the illusion of making by phone an appointment with his solicitor. He was uneasy enough to know that Blanche's eye was upon him, but he was grateful to her for making no comment as he mooned from room to room, took up the morning paper and dropped it again, or changed the roll on the barograph. And would that old devil of a doctor never come? He allowed himself a passionate grievance against the members of that profession, choosing their own time, keeping heart-broken people in suspense.

It was after midday before the doctor did come, and then to pass an exasperatingly cheerful word and disappear into the forbidden territory of the nursery. Leslie, however, forgot and forgave everything when he came out again, beaming, and sat down to a cigarette and a glass of sherry in the lounge.

"Yes, Mr. Pagan, John should be all right now——" as if the recovery were a product of his own unique wisdom. "The temperature's down. He's easier all over. Another week, and he'll be up again. Your good health! A very pleasant sherry, if I may say so. Poor John and that chest of his! Do take care of him in this beastly climate, Mrs. Pagan. It's sunlight and warmth he needs, that boy."

There it was again—that stab of the sharp, secret issue between him and Blanche. He was careful not to look at her. But John was well again. The spectre of the great fear had receded into the shadows. The burden of guilt had been lifted off his shoulders. Dear, dear John was well again. He would see him soon. And did every parent have to know this agony of love?

The fog had lifted somewhat after lunch. The absurd

Victorian turrets of the large villa across the road began to loom through the haze, and there was a hint of iridescence from the sun on the woolly peaks of the mistlayer towards Anniesland. Fog or no fog, however, Leslie knew that he could not longer delay his approach to the day's last dreadful emergency and could not, whatever the circumstances, hesitate before the sombre duty. John was well again, out of the dark glen of danger, but the personal relief could not lighten the load of responsibility. He must hurry down the road to see it through. And how, he wondered moodily as he drove cautiously through the fog at Anniesland Cross, would the world seem with the gates of Pagan's closed?

It was queer to be back in the office when already in his mind he had said farewell to it. It gave a man the feeling of being an actor in a play. There was all that unreality about the fashion in which Miss Macgregor drew his attention to some items in the morning's correspondence. The letters, and all the responsibility bound up with them, seemed irrelevant now. Dakers could deal with them. Dakers would love dealing with them. Leslie told Miss Macgregor to take them to the secretary, but he did not fail to notice her glance, compound of curiosity, surprise, and pity. Deliberately he set himself to study a set of blue-prints that came in for the drawing-office, and, in the technical problems they raised, was lucky enough to lose himself.

His father came about four o'clock, and he took tea with the old man in the boardroom. They had little to say to each other. Behind the assumption of cheerful cynicism Leslie could discern uneasiness. Perhaps it was a discomfort greater than his own. A longer bond than his, after all, was about to be broken. Pagan's closing down—Lord, but it made a man think far beyond the bounds of the personal!

The dusk came down, and yet they did not switch on the lights. It seemed necessary to remain in the tactful gleam of the coal in the great fireplace. Standing by the window, Leslie glanced backwards once to see a figure strangely dramatised, his father in a deep armchair, his head on one hand, his fine, brooding face lit by the glow. From that he turned quickly to gaze sombrely across the misted yard towards the River and to think how queerly the large, inscrutable forces of economics dealt with the lives of men.

His train of thought was interrupted by the voice from the fireside.

"So this is what it comes to?"

"I don't see a way out," answered Leslie emptily.

"Well, it's not the first time in my experience," sighed the voice.

So they remained until it came near five o'clock and Leslie saw, streaming noiselessly towards the gate, the crowds of men who were to lift their last pay as they went out. It was like seeing the passage of a phantom army, and there was a lump in his throat as he watched them: so helpless and patient did they seem, streaming out on to the unfriendly streets that foggy winter night. He was gripped then by the sentiment of the old days of war and remembered the endless files of Scottish men he had seen come and go, rough, cheerful, fatalistic, endlessly and blindly suffering. He remembered how, once in Gallipoli, up by Backhouse Post and momentarily blinded and shocked by a shell-burst, he had groped his way about the trenches, crying: "Boys! Oh, my boys!" since he believed himself to have betrayed and lost his company. And was that suffering worse than this?

He dragged himself from the window at length.

"I must go and see Dakers," he said abruptly.

"Dakers? Ah, yes!" the old man sighed, then rose. "I'll get along myself. We must have a talk one of these days, Leslie. Perhaps Blanche will give me tea. I must see John."

John—yes, Leslie himself wanted to get back to John, whom nothing save the act of God could take from him. For an hour or so he made himself busy about his own room, but at length he had to force himself to go out on to the streets in the wake of the men who had gone out perhaps for ever.

The fog was thickening again, and it was bitter cold. The thought of warmth and company allured him, and he wondered if he might not once again look in to see the boys in O'Glinchey's. The notion was barely in his mind when he dismissed it, as if it were impertinent. No more O'Glinchey's for him. From that innocent condemnation he was debarred for ever. The boys were no longer Pagan's boys, his own boys, but individuals now, defensive and possibly hostile. He did not in his mind deny them the right to be so. All he knew was regret and pity as, automatically, he steered the car eastwards through a shrouded world.

There was nobody in the lounge at home. A maid told him that his father was gone, and that Blanche had run into town to do some shopping—for Master John, who was asleep. He found that the evening paper did not interest him, not even a column of rumours about the giant Cunarder, symbol of the Clyde's stagnation, an unfinished shell on the stocks at Clydebank. He let the paper drop to the floor and closed his eyes to think. There was such a lot to think about.

He stirred to the touch of lips on his cheek and the feel of soft fingers running through his hair. There was a perfume about him. . . . Blanche. . . . He must have been asleep.

"Hullo, old man!" her voice, now very tender, greeted him. "Very weary?"

She was on her knees before him, smiling bewitchingly into his face.

"Sweetheart!" And he drew her face to his and kissed her. "So sorry!"

"My dearest!" she murmured. "There's just no need to be sorry. You're tired out. I'm tired, Poor old John's tired. And it's a miserable world to-night with the fog and the cold. Oh, can't we all go away for a holiday!"

He smiled at her, his awareness of her small stratagem blending not unhelpfully with his affection.

"Rascal!" he twitted her, tapping her cheek with his finger.

"But you mustn't misunderstand me, old boy!" she protested. "There's John—we must give him a chance to get well. You heard what the doctor said. And you're just wearied out yourself, my own dear. Oh, do let's go for a month—down to Cuckton, the Riviera, Italy, anywhere! I know daddy will love to have us for Christmas. And I do so want to buy some pretties in London."

He laughed then.

"I wish I could think why not!" he answered her. "God knows I could do with a rest for a bit."

CHAPTER FOUR

SATURDAY IN GLASGOW

It took him a long time to make up his mind. Habit and impulse fought endlessly against caution and sympathy.

But Danny Shields did not in the end go to O'Glinchey's that night of the big pay-off at Pagan's.

He had stood enough chaff and seen and heard plenty of sneers that afternoon. There was more chaff than sneers : he would say that for the boys. Many of his old mates, jesting in the face of calamity, had found it possible to invent rough artisans' pleasantries.

"Hear ye're being kept on to finish the Cunarder at Clydebank, Danny."

"Hey, Danny ! Will ye be good for a sub next Friday ? "

Or, "Another bar to your medal—ch, Dan ? "

There were others, however, especially among the younger men, who took the trouble to make him feel ashamed and angry.

"Here's the boss's fancy man ! " they would cry at his approach, and laugh sardonically.

"G'on, ye lousy wee sucker ! " one man said angrily as they collided in a dark alleyway of the *Estramadura*.

He was actually squaring up to fight Cocky Magee when the gaffer came along and sent them about their work.

No : he was a marked man one way or another, and he would give O'Glinchey's the go-by, much as it hurt him to miss the usual yarn and drinks of good fellowship with Jimmy Affleck and long Jock Macgrory. This was something to tell Agnes, anyhow—kept on while scores of others were put on the street. It was only a damned good man that was kept on nowadays. That was something there was no denying. He began to feel there was a virtue in cutting out O'Glinchey's as the red tram bore him eastwards. Wasting money : that's what it came to when you looked at it the right way. These were hard times, and after what had happened that afternoon at Pagan's a chap had to think twice about things.

Somehow it did not clash with this philosophy to get off the tram at Partick Cross and make direct for the Horseshoe. There was the sixpence to be paid up for the accumulator, and a wee half and a half-pint wouldn't go far wrong ; then home to a quiet evening with the coupon for to-morrow's games.

The bar was busy on that evening of pay-day, but Tommy the charge-hand was quickly forward to take his order.

"Hear there's been a big pay-off doon bye, Danny ? " he eagerly enquired.

"That's right," Danny was proud to reply. "Coupla hundred men, mebbe."

"Jesus!" said the barman. "That's a ruddy knockout, eh? Is it a' right wi' you?"

"Sure!" replied Danny gallantly, then lowered his voice to a confidential mutter. "Me and the boss gets on fine, see." And he winked.

"Is that so?" queried Tommy, handing over a creaming glass.

"I was his batman, see. Gallipoli, Egypt, Palestine, France. Four sucking years of it. The boss is standin' by me, see."

"You've clicked right enough," said the barman, impressed.

"Sure," observed Danny again, "and knobs on."

At that point, in the glow of his pride, he saw that another half and half-pint would be within the bounds of moderation, and as he ordered it, a friendly voice spoke over his shoulders.

"Heard ye saying ye was in Egypt and Palestine, Mac?"

"By God and I was!" cried Danny defiantly.

"Same here," said the voice.

It belonged to a tallish man with sandy, thin, humorous face. He had the look of the out-of-work upon him; his clothes neat but worn, his tweed cap stained, his mouth pinched.

"What was your mob, son?" asked Danny.

"Sappers. 'Member the pipe line?"

"Pipe line!" Danny addressed the Gods. "Holy crivvens, I nearly broke my flakin' back on yer pipe line! Workin' parties—Jesus!"

"I remember," the stranger chuckled. "Sweating in thon heat!"

"And thon camels!" Danny capped him. "*Imshi! Ee-e-ch!* Remember the bastards? Gave ye a dose if they bit ye."

"Remember!"

"Were ye there the night the Ak-an'-Esses-Aitch, the Greenock mob, pinched the rum at El Maadan?"

"Aye—the dirty sooners." The stranger drained his glass of beer.

"Here, mate, what are you having?" Danny insisted.

"Half-pint, my foot! Tommy—hey, Tommy! Two halves and two half-pints. Crivvens, boy, it's great to see one of the old crush! Remember the train from Alex.—*Toot-toot! Sidi Gabr?*"

The old comrades laughed uproariously at that sweet, redolent memory of the brave days ; so loudly that the barman looked at Danny and shook a warning head. But Danny was beyond such a meanness of discipline now. He was living again, a soldier, a man, one of the right sort beside him to understand the loveliness of their monstrous liberation.

"Ach, they don't know what it was, these young toots ! " cried Danny, contemptuous of a softer generation.

"Holy God ! " said the stranger. "I'd like to see them up to their backsides in cold mud somewhere outside Eepeer thonder."

"Aye, Eepeer," Danny agreed. "Somewhere near thon pill-boxes about Steenbeck. But here's a funny thing——" he went off at a tangent sentimentally. "D'ye know this? D'ye know that the birth of my nephew—Willie, that's the oldest—was posted up in Eepeer? Right in the main square thonder, in battalion orders. 'To the wife of No. 5934¹ Lance-Corporal Shields'—that's my brother—'a son.' Right in the bloody main square! Eh?"

"Is that a fact?" His friend was properly impressed, but was not prepared to allow Danny to luxuriate in the reminiscence. "Reminds me of a mate of mines," he said, "Alf Barrett, a Cockney block in our mob. His wife was away the trip when he sailed for Alex., and when we got to Malta——"

"A great place Malta," Danny interjected.

"Aye, but listen to this. This block, Alf Barrett—a right Cockney he was. . . ."

They were off, afloat on the wide and turbulent stream of reminiscence that flows when two old soldiers are gathered together. On its breast they drifted back through time to the land of youth, back out of isolation and the misunderstanding of the laity to the places that were scarred and outraged by war but ever dear for their redolence of youth and danger and comradeship, back from the slavery of the commonplace to the freedom of the prime. They ranged large areas of the world's surface, these two—much of the Scotland and England of the training camps, the licentious London of leave, the Mediterranean littoral, the Holy Land, France and Flanders. They brought in relations and friends to widen their scope, the stranger a brother in Mesopotamia, and Danny a friend with the Navy. They were elaborate in creating

the atmosphere of every anecdote. They lost each other often while a tale domestic to the narrator's unit followed a tortuous trail. Latterly they were not listening to each other at all, but merely dipping the bucket into the well of memory in a glory of competition.

From this jumble of cross-currents they returned at length to mutual awareness over an issue concerning the conduct and progress of the Second Battle of Gaza.

It was Danny who held the field at the moment. In spilt beer on the counter he had drawn with his forefinger a plan of the operations as he conceived them to have shaped and was demonstrating his own unit's unique part in them with the eager exactness of a pedagogue.

"See here now," he begged his companion's concentrated attention. "We were lying there——" and he laid a finger in a canal of beer athwart the counter. "The Ack-an'-Esses-Aitch was *there*. An' the 6th H.L.I. was *there* in reserve. See?"

"They was not," said his friend with surprising decision. "The 6th was in the line on the right. It was the 7th was in reserve."

"It was not," said Danny firmly. "It was the 6th. Christ, I was there myself, wasn't I?"

"Christ, and so was I! I'm tellin' ye, matc, it was the Seventh in reserve. See? The *Seventh*."

"And I'm tellin' ye it was the *Sixth*."

Their voices started to rise, and the barman cautioned them with a quiet word. They quite ignored him.

"It was *nut*," the stranger asserted.

"But it was *sut*," cried Danny angrily.

"I suppose you were the only bloody soldier in the battle," the other sneered.

"Aye, a soldier," Danny snorted, "not a bloody sapper."

The bond between them snapped. The warm ties of blood-brotherhood were split asunder. Now each saw the other as an enemy predestined, as an intolerable claimant to a share of his own unique distinction. Ancient and ineradicable loyalties flamed in their hearts. Neither could bear that the other should think to have made such a contribution of courage and sacrifice as his own to the Cause that was their original bond.

"By God, ye bowly-legged runt," cried the sapper, "I'll knock yer block off!"

"I'll plug ye, ye . . ."

Danny's hands were on the man's lapels to tear off his

jacket when he was suddenly and firmly seized from behind. Shouting his anger and defiance, he was rapidly frog-marched to the swing-doors of the shop, pushed rudely through them, and sent staggering across the pavement. Recovering, bent on the destruction of his enemy, he found himself face to face with the barman who stood in the doorway, his hands on his hips, ready.

"Let me get at that twister," shrieked Danny, seeking roughly to push past the white apron.

He got a blow on the chest that sent him staggering again.

"Beat it, now," said the barman firmly, "or I'll call the cop. D'ye hear? Beat it."

There was that in his tone which momentarily snuffed the flame of Danny's anger. The firm mention of the police permitted the detonation within his heated mind of a number of sobering ideas—the fundamental insecurity of his job at the Yard, his obligation to Leslie Pagan, his subscriptions to the accumulator, Wee Mirren, and the absolute necessity that he should see the Rangers-Celtic match at Ibrox next day. His eye caught the white coat of a traffic policeman at the corner. He hesitated.

"Beat it, now," said the barman.

"I'll get that ruddy twister yet," grumbled Danny truculently and turned away.

He had drunk too much, and was aware of the fact, but the knowledge had no power to subdue him. There was a fire in his belly that could only be quenched in combat of some sort: he needed the satisfaction of triumph over the enemies by whom he was beset. Now and again he laughed out loud as he went along, then his mood would turn black at the thought of the unspeakable stupidity, the complete hatefulness, of the man in the Horseshoe. That swine wanted his block knocked off and would get it one of these days. Then he remembered those who had sneered at him in the Yard and again burned to fight.

This mood of independence and pugnacity was not soothed by the sharpness of the greeting Agnes gave him when he entered the kitchen of their home.

"Oh, ye're back, are ye?" she snapped at him. "Boozing, I suppose."

His hands clenched. Too often she tempted him to strike her.

"Ye'd drive any man to it with your nag, nag, nagging."

She evaded his anger. To him it seemed that she did not recognise it or any justification for it.

"Well, remember we're going to the Pictures with Lizzie and Jim. Away and get yourself washed and dressed."

Danny sat down to unlace his boots.

"I'm goin' to no Pictures with Lizzie and Jim," he said. "Lizzie and Jim can go to hell for all I care."

"Aye, I've heard ye at that before," she retorted coolly.

"Lizzie and Jim! I'm fed up hearin' about Lizzie and Jim! He's only a dirty wee bookie."

"But ye'll waste yer night on the coupouns all the same," she said with a justifiable irony that passed, however, over his head.

"I'm damned if I'm going out with Lizzie and Jim, if that's what you want to know," he repeated vehemently.

"Well, you can just stick," she retorted.

2

These asperities were quite forgotten by the morning. They were too much the common currency of their domestic exchange to be remarkable in any event; and it so happened that the Friday evening passed very pleasantly for each of them.

A large tea inside him, including a black pudding of considerable size, Danny achieved peace of mind. The alcoholic anger melted from his consciousness and left him the friendly glow of repletion. Agnes did not return once to the obsession about Lizzie and Jim and the Pictures. Before the meal was over he was boasting to her of his unique immunity in the matter of the pay-off at Pagan's and she, after her fashion, was complimenting him on the distinction and exclaiming at her own luck. Then, when she had gone, Peter stayed behind and assisted in the filling up of the coupon, revealing a particularly helpful knowledge of the form in the South sub-section of the Third Division of the English League; and he stayed in while Danny went out for a final drink at half-past nine. Billy sat like a mouse by the fire, reading, and went to bed when he was told. Wee Mirren slept the evening through and stirred only when her mother returned at the back of eleven, her face flushed.

Agnes, too, had passed an agreeable time. She had

seen Ronald Colman on the screen of one of the swell picture houses in Sauchiehall Street, and Jim had risen to balcony seats and ices. He had had his car parked in Holland Street, and after the show, had run them down to the lounge of the Adelphi for a round or two of drinks, in which Agnes's favourite wee ports figured pleasantly, and then had run her home as far as Partick Cross.

"Oh, and Dan!" she blurted out finally. "They're awful keen for us to go out the morn's night. Not to the Pictures, but a wee supper. Jim's got a friend from England coming up, and they want to give him a night out. Could you not come after the match?"

A sudden shadow of resentment clouded Danny's mind. He could not like Lizzie and her husband, and he vaguely distrusted their influence on Agnes. But there was something in her eagerness that melted him, something that his Friday evening complaisance could not resist—and she had by an implication more cunning than he quite appreciated indicated that she would not nag him if he wished to go to the match.

"Ach to hell! I suppose we might as well," said Danny.

If he regretted that desperate affability by breakfast time on Saturday, he did not confess the fact. There was never time for argument in the rush of getting to the Yard by eight o'clock, nor did Agnes ever quite emerge from sleep while he made his own breakfast, gulped it down, and hurried out. And on this great day of the Rangers-Celtic match at Ibrox, Danny was almost incapable of thinking beyond the thrills of the afternoon.

Anticipation of the game was indeed an obsession. An honest, keen workman, he found his labour in the Yard that morning an irritating irrelevance. If he worked hard, it was so that the hour of release might seem to come more quickly. Unhappily for him, his position as one who was there by favour, as a riveter for whom no task of riveting remained, was uneasy.

"I suppose I'll have to make work for you," the foreman sneered. "A riveter's no damned use to me. Och, go and give old Tom a hand in the Store there. We'll see on Monday. . . ."

The man went off grumbling, and Danny was left with a double burden. He knew there was nothing for him to do in the Store that would keep him decently occupied; and the weakness of his supernumerary position had been

emphasised. He greatly feared that particular foreman and his prejudices. What if the Major should forget the promise? A blue lookout indeed, and a nice come-down from the triumphs of yesterday!

These anxieties he quickly forgot in friendly chat with brosy old Tom, who had himself not sufficient work to keep him going, and his heart leaped when the foreman popped his head over the half-door of the store about eleven and called on Dangy to run across to the engine-shop with a message to the foreman there. For this meant a licensed escape from the yard at a vital hour—and Danny had just remembered his need of something necessary to his enjoyment of the afternoon.

In their wisdom, the Magistrates of that part of the world in which Pagan's was situated had long ordained that public-houses should open at ten and close at noon on Saturdays. The ordinance was based on the theory that the working-man should not be tempted to squander his wages on strong drink on his way home, and had no doubt a bearing on public behaviour at the afternoon football games; but as the artisan had for many a day past been paid on Fridays it was only an interesting anachronism of local administration and bore hardly on such as Danny who desired refreshment in anticipation of other enjoyments. So the foreman's gruff order rejoiced him. It was easy to slip into Mackenzie's, between Yard and engine-shop, swallow a quick half and half-pint, buy a flat half-mutchkin of whisky for the pocket and the cold vigil on the terraces, and time his return to the Store almost as the whistle boomed the signal for the week-end release.

Thereafter there was nothing in the world for him but the Game. He hurried home, hurried through his washing and changing and eating, and, as if all the claims of family and hearth were nothing now, was out on the streets again half an hour before two o'clock, a unit of one of the streams of men converging from all parts of the city and from all its outliers on the drab embankments round an oblong of turf in Ibrox.

The surge of the stream was already apparent in the Dumbarton Road. Even though only a few wore favours of the Rangers blue, there was that of purpose in the air of hurrying groups of men which infallibly indicated their intention. It was almost as if they had put on uniform for the occasion, for most were attired as Danny was in decent dark suits under rainproofs or overcoats, with great

flat caps of light tweed on their heads. Most of them smoked cigarettes that shivered in the corners of their mouths as they fiercely debated the prospects of the day. Hardly one of them but had his hands deep in his pockets.

The scattered procession, as it were of an order almost religious, poured itself through the mean entrance to the Subway station at Partick Cross. The decrepit turnstiles clattered endlessly, and there was much rough, good-humoured jostling as the devotees bounded down the wooden stairs to struggle for advantageous positions on the crowded platform. Glasgow's subway system is of high antiquarian interest and smells very strangely of age. Its endless cables, whirling innocently over the pulleys, are at once absurd and fascinating, its signalling system a matter for the laughter of a later generation. But to Danny and the hundreds milling about him there was no strange spectacle here : only a means of approach to a shrine ; and strongly they pushed and wrestled when at length a short train of toylike dimensions rattled out of the tunnel into the station.

It seemed full to suffocation already, but Danny, being alone and ruthless in his use of elbow and shoulder, contrived somehow to squeeze through a narrow doorway on to a crowded platform. Others pressed in behind him while official whistles skirled hopelessly without, and before the urgent crowd was forced back at last and the doors laboriously closed, he was packed tight among taller men of his kind, his arms pinned to his sides, his lungs so compressed that he gasped.

"For the love o' Mike . . ." he pleaded.

"Have ye no' heard there's a fitba' match the day, wee man ?" asked a tall humorist beside him.

Everybody laughed at that. For them there was nothing odd or notably objectionable in their dangerous discomfort. It was, at the worst, a purgatorial episode on the passage to Elysium.

So they passed under the River to be emptied in their hundreds among the red sandstone tenements of the South Side. Under the high banks of the Park a score of streams met and mingled, the streams that had come by train or tram or motor car or on foot to see the Game of Games.

Danny ran for it as soon as his feet were on earth's surface again, selecting in an experienced glance the turnstile with the shortest queue before it, ignoring quite the mournful column that waited without hope at the

Unemployed Gate. His belly pushed the bar precisely as his shilling smacked on the iron counter. A moment later he was tearing as if for dear life up the long flight of cindered steps leading to the top of the embankment.

He achieved his favourite position without difficulty : high on one of the topmost terraces and behind the eastern goal. Already the huge amphitheatre seemed well filled. Except where the monstrous stands broke the skyline there were cliffs of human faces, for all the world like banks of gravel, with thin clouds of tobacco smoke drifting across them. But Danny knew that thousands were still to come to pack the terraces to the point of suffocation, and, with no eyes for the sombre strangeness of the spectacle, he proceeded to establish himself by setting his arms firmly along the iron bar before him and making friendly, or at least argumentative, contact with his neighbours.

He was among enthusiasts of his own persuasion. In consonance with ancient custom the police had shepherded supporters of the Rangers to one end of the ground and supporters of the Celtic to the other : so far as segregation was possible with such a great mob of human beings. For this game between Glasgow's two leading teams, had more in it than the simple test of relative skill. Their colours, blue and green, were symbolic. Behind the rivalry of players, behind even the commercial rivalry of limited companies, was the dark significance of sectarian and racial passions. Blue for the Protestants of Scotland and Ulster, green for the Roman Catholics of the Free State ; and it was a bitter war that was to be waged on that strip of white-barred turf. All the social problems of a hybrid city were to be sublimated in the imminent clash of mercenaries.

Danny was as ready as the next man to fight a supporter of the other team, but he had no opportunity of doing so. They were solid for Rangers within a radius of twenty yards from where he stood, and time until the kick-off was pleasantly taken up with discussion of the miracles their favourites could perform. They needed no introductions to one another. Expertise was assumed. The anxiety was that the Rangers team, as announced and on form, could be relied on to beat the men from the East. It was taken for granted that the Rangers were in normal circumstances the superiors of the Celts ; but here, it seemed, were special circumstances to render the issue of the afternoon's match peculiarly obscure.

Danny had some heartening exchanges with a man, smaller and older and grimmer than himself, who at his elbow smoked a clay pipe with a very short stem. The small man was not prepared to be unduly optimistic. Rangers were a fine bunch of boys, but the Celtic had been playing up great these last few Saturdays.

"It's a' in the melting-pot," declared the small man, who had been reading the newspapers. "I'm tellin' ye—it's a' in the bloody melting-pot."

"Melting-pot, my foot!" Danny insisted gallantly. "It's all in Alan Morton's left toe—out on the wing there. Wait till ye see the wee dandy."

"Alan's fine," the small man allowed gravely. "Alan's a dandy. Alan's the best bloody outside left in fitba' the day. But I've been studying form, see?" He paused to let an attenuated dribble of saliva fall between his feet, and it took him a long time to wipe clean the stem of his short pipe. "I've been studying form. Aye, I've been studying form—reading a' the papers, looking back a' the records—and it's like this. When ye've the Rangers here and the Celtic there and there's no much between them in the League——"

His discourse was interrupted by the irreverent voice of a youth behind. "Does the wife know ye're out, old man?" it asked.

Laughter, half-friendly, half-derisive, rose about them.

"I'll knock your block off, young fella," said the old fellow, turning gravely on the youth and slowly removing the pipe from his wet mouth.

"Please, teacher, I'm sorry I spoke," his tormentor assured him, mock-afraid.

They all laughed again; and so it went on—rough give-and-take, simple wisdom and facetious nonsense, passion and sentiment, hate and friendly laughter—while a brass band pumped out melody in the lee of the grandstand and press photographers hovered restlessly in anticipation of the appearance of the teams.

The Celtic came first, strangely attractive in their white and green, and there was a roar from the western end of the ground. ("Hefty-looking lot o' bastards," admitted the small, old man at Danny's side.) They were followed by a party of young men in light blue jerseys; and then it seemed that the low-hanging clouds must split at the impact of the yell that rose to greet them from forty-thousand throats. The referee appeared, jaunty in his shorts and

khaki jacket ; the linesmen, similarly attired, ran to their positions. In a strange hush, broken only by the thud of footballs kicked by the teams uneasily practising, the captains tossed for ends. Ah ! Rangers had won and would play with the sou'-westerly wind, straight towards the goal behind which Danny stood in his eagerness.

This was enough to send a man off his head. Good old Rangers—and to hell with the Pope ! Danny gripped the iron bar before him. The players trotted limberly to their positions. For a moment there was dead silence over Ibrox Park. Then the whistle blew, a thin, curt, almost feeble announcement of glory.

For nearly two hours thereafter Danny Shields lived far beyond himself in a whirling world of passion. All sorts of racial emotions were released by this clash of athletic young men ; the old clans of Scotland lived again their ancient hatreds in this struggle for goals. Not a man on the terraces paused to reflect that it was a spectacle cunningly arranged to draw their shillings, or to remember that the twenty-two players were so many slaves of a commercial system, liable to be bought and sold like fallen women, without any regard for their feelings as men. Rangers had drawn their warriors from all corners of Scotland, lads from mining villages, boys from Ayrshire farms, and even an undergraduate from the University of Glasgow. Celtic likewise had ranged the industrial belt and even crossed to Ulster and the Free State for men fit to win matches so that dividends might accrue. But for such as Danny they remained peerless and fearless warriors, saints of the Blue or the Green as it might be ; and in delight in the cunning moves of them, in their tricks and asperities, the men on the terraces found release from the drabness of their own industrial degradation.

That release they expressed in ways extremely violent. They exhorted their favourites to dreadful enterprises of assault and battery. They loudly questioned every decision of the referee. In moments of high tension they raved obscenely, using a language ugly and violent in its wealth of explosive consonants—f's and k's and b's expressing the vehemence of their passions. The young man behind Danny, he who had chaffed his scientific neighbour, was notable in foulness of speech. His commentary on the game was unceasing, and not an observation could he make but one primitive Anglo-Saxon epithet must qualify every noun—and serve, frequently, as a verb. It was as if a

fever of hate had seized that multitude, neutralising for the time everything gracious and kindly.

Yet that passionate horde had its wild and liberating humours. Now and again a flash of rough jocularly would release a gust of laughter, so hearty that it was as if they rejoiced to escape from the bondage of their own intensity of partisanship. Once in a while a clever movement by one of the opposition team would evoke a mutter of unwilling but sincere admiration. They were abundantly capable of calling upon their favourites to use their brawn, but they were punctilious in the observation of the unwritten laws that are called those of sportsmanship. They constituted, in fact, a stern but ultimate reliable jury, demanding of their entertainers the very best they could give, insisting that the spectacle be staged with all the vigour that could be brought to it.

The Old Firm—thus the evening papers conventionally described the meeting of Rangers and Celtic. It was a game fought hard and fearless and merciless, and it was but the rub of the business that the wearers of the Blue scored seven minutes from half-time.

The goal was the outcome of a movement so swift that even a critic of Danny's perspicacity could hardly tell just how it happened. What is it to say that a back cleared from near the Rangers' goal; that the ball went on the wind to the nimble feet of Alan Morton on the left wing; that that small but intense performer carried it at lightning speed down the line past this man in green-and-white and then that; that he crossed before the menace of a charging back, the ball soaring in a lovely curve to the waiting centre; and that it went then like a rocket into a corner of the Celtic net, the goalkeeper sprawling in a futile endeavour to stop it?

It was a movement completed almost as soon as it was begun and Danny did not really understand it until he read his evening paper on the way home. But it was a goal, a goal for Rangers, and he went mad for a space.

With those about him he screamed his triumph, waving his cap wildly above his head, taunting most foully those who might be in favour of a team so thoroughly humiliated as the Celtic.

From this orgasm he recovered at length.

"Christ!" he panted. "That was a bobbydazzler."

"Good old Alan!" screeched the young man behind.

"Ye've got the suckers bitched!"

"A piece of perfect bloody positioning," gravely observed the scientist on Danny's left.

"Positioning, ma foot!" snorted Danny. "It was just bloomin' good fitba! Will ye have a snifter, old fella?"

So they shared the half-mutchkin of raw whisky, the small man politely wiping the neck of the bottle with his sleeve before handing it back to Danny.

"That's a good dram, son," he observed judicially.

Half-time permitted of discussion that was not, however, without its heat, the young man behind exploiting a critical theory of half-back play that kept some thirty men about him in violent controversy until the whistle blew again. Then the fever came back on them with redoubled fury—One—nothing for Rangers at half-time made an almost agonising situation; and as the Celtic battled to equalise, breaking themselves again and again on a defence grimly determined to hold its advantage, the waves of green hurling themselves on rocks of blue, there was frenzy on the terraces.

When, five minutes before time, the men from the East were awarded a penalty kick, Danny's heart stopped beating for a space, and when the fouled forward sent the ball flying foolishly over the net, it nearly burst. The Rangers would win. "Stick it, lads!" he yelled again and again. "Kick the tripes out the dirty Papists!" The Rangers would win. They must win. . . . A spirt of whistle; and, by God, they had won!

In immediate, swift reaction, Danny turned then and, without a word to his neighbours, started to fight his way to the top of the terracing and along the fence that crowned it to the stairs and the open gate. To the feelings of those he jostled and pushed he gave not the slightest thought. Now the battle was for a place in the Subway, and he ran as soon as he could, hurtling down the road, into the odorous maw of Copland Road station and through the closing door of a train that had already started on its journey northwards.

He even got a seat and was glad of it. Now he felt tired and flat after that long stand on a step of beaten cinders and nearly two hours of extreme emotional strain. It had been a hell of an afternoon, right enough! At Partick Cross he paused only to buy an evening paper before darting into the public-house nearest at hand. It was disappointing that the barman already knew the result, thanks to the daily miracle of the Press, and he saw in a glance at the stop-press that his coupon was burst

again—Queen's Park down to St. Mirren at home, the bunch of stiff! But the accumulator looked good, his team having nine goals to their credit in two matches and a 2—1 victory as like as possible next Saturday. And there was the glory of telling with authority how Rangers, those shining heroes, had won at Ibrox that very afternoon.

Danny was happy and in his contentment thought kindly of Agnes at home. There remained in his mind the substance of his promise to her, and he did not linger unduly over his glass and pint. She too would welcome his news of victory, and he hurried home to tell her.

"My, that's fine, Dan!" she triumphed with him. "It must have been great. But I've left your good clothes ben in the room, and ye'd best go and change now. We're to be at the Commodore at six."

3

He realised soon enough that his enthusiasm for the outing was very much a product of self-deception.

To begin with, the donning of his good clothes did not square with his conception of an evening's enjoyment, for he hated both their stiffness and their associations. That blue serge suit, that cold, white shirt with stiff cuffs and collar—they were fine for a funeral or a marriage when a degree of formality was to be allowed and life a penance for the time being. It was for Danny, however, a strange and vaguely inimical world that Agnes was drawing him into with its notions that you had to be rigged up like a toff and haltered like an animal before you could begin having a bit of fun.

A grievance worked within him as he dressed. He cursed the linen collar and would gladly have torn its buttonhole if he could. It was the only one he had, and his longing concentrated on the soft one he knew to be in the drawer.

And of course Agnes was not nearly ready when he re-entered the kitchen, hot from the struggle. She was still in her petticoat and was very intent before the mirror at the sink with powder and a pencil for her eyebrows.

"For God's sake!" he upbraided her meekly enough. "I suppose ye're going to keep me late?"

"What's yer hurry?" she retorted coolly. "There's plenty of time."

Was that not a woman all over? Chivvying him in to change and now herself indulging in a selfish deliberation. Well, there was always the paper to read; but he got no great joy that evening from it. It was not a Sports Final, and the reports were sketchy surveys of first-halves only. With some interest he read a news story of an order booked by Scott's of Greenock for a tanker—but the point was: when would Agnes get a move on? There was a fuss with the dress after she had slipped it over her head. Then it seemed that her hair called for extremely solicitous attention. Then, to his dismay, she put on an apron and started to attend to Wee Mirren.

"For the love o' Mike . . ." he appealed to her.

"Ach, shut yer face and let me get on," she snapped at him.

She was late, of course. It was five to six before she stood ready, her bag under the arm of a brown coat with fur collar and cuffs. And then she said: "Are ye never coming?"

"Ready," he answered. "On you go."

Moving warily behind her, he lifted from the peg on the door the cloth cap he had worn at the football match and pulled it down over his forehead, but she was waiting for him on the landing.

"Aye, I just thought it," she said, snatching the thing from his head. "Ye'll go back and hang that where ye got it, and ye'll put on yer hard hat, see?"

Grumbling, but meekly, he obeyed. There was no escape. The bowler of formality lay where she had left it out for him on Billy's bed, and he had to put it on.

"Come on, then," she said purposefully when he rejoined her.

Anybody who saw them pass up the street towards the tram stop in the Dumbarton Road must have recognised in them a couple bent on an unusual adventure. Poor Danny marched self-consciously, for all the world like a seaman ashore for the first time in a year, extremely uncomfortable in his hard hat and stiff collar. About Agnes there was an air of bustling, fussing eagerness, and she hurried along somewhat awkwardly in the high-heeled shoes of patent leather she had bought for the occasion. Little passed between them, for they could not comfortably discuss the evening's prospects and they were aware in their hearts that their fellow-travellers in a crowded tram would stare should any chance remark establish an

association between their good clothes and an unusual sort of night out. It was necessary to appear composed and at ease. Producing his black pipe with its metal cover on the top-deck of the tram, Danny was reminded by a sharp dig of Agnes's elbow that he must again forget the habits of a lifetime. So he smoked a cigarette out of a packet he had bought to grace the occasion, handling it clumsily, almost as if it were distasteful.

The sobbing of violin-strings welcomed them into the Commodore. His sensibilities defensively acute, Danny noticed also an acrid charge of perfumed disinfectant in the air and what seemed to him an excessive number of men in uniform or evening-dress under the dome of the reception hall. At once he felt an alien in this atmosphere of elegance, which was much more artificial than he knew, and was immediately conscious of his dress, of his gawkinsness, and of the sharp, excited pleasure that Agnes took in being in it. As he followed her past the shining desks and lighted kiosks and among the pillars of bogus marble, a deep resentment, compound of the senses of betrayal and presumption, and an attitude of defiance shaped themselves in his mind.

The great lounge of the place was packed, each table held by a cohort of lower middle-class Glasgow folk rejoicing in the release into metropolitanism provided by the Jewish management of the Commodore through the medium of cocktails and music at moderate rates. Danny was bemused by the spectacle and the shimmer of festival sound, but to Agnes it all seemed delightfully familiar.

"There's Lizzie and Jim!" she belled suddenly, catching him in the ribs with her elbow. "Come on."

Rapidly she threaded her way among the tables, Danny at her heels, his heavy boots clattering on the spaces of parquet floor between the rugs. He saw the robustly welcoming figure of his brother-in-law rise from behind a table near the orchestra.

"Come away! Come away, the two of you!" cried Jim heartily. "We thought you had got lost. Agnes, Danny—meet my friend, Mr. Leake, from London."

"And call me Alf," said Mr. Leake agreeably.

"And ye'll have a drink," Jim went on rapidly. "Waiter! Waiter!" His fat, arrogant hand pounded the knob of the bell on the table. "Where's that bloody man got to?"

Danny was silent in the face of this tornado of hospitality

and of the febrile garrulity of the women folk. Something told him that this was an atmosphere unfavourable to the ordering of a half-pint with the whisky he craved, so he contented himself with a modest request for "a wee one," only to hear his modesty derided by Jim and to be assured violently that he could either have a big one or go to hell.

That was the new Jim : the Jim he did not understand and uneasily suspected. The old Jim of five years before had been a decent, quiet-living chap, foreman vanman in the Govan Dairies, but he had strangely changed. That fortunate little investment in the Dogs had recouped him at the rate of three hundred per cent per annum, and now there was a new Jim—who, as Agnes enviously and proudly phrased it, had done so well for himself—with his queer, ambiguous interests in bookmaking, the films, boxing and, indeed, all those activities that, catering for an uneasy generation, shelter and sustain in affluence so many latter-day pimps.

This Mr. Leake, this Alf, was also of the breed, as Danny realised very quickly. He wore a very natty suit in dark grey and pointed shoes of patent leather, and a heavy perfume of pomade hung about him. He was tall and dark, and his manner to the ladies was an exquisite blend of deference and patronage. Agnes positively flowered in the easy warmth of his addresses and, jealously aware of her silliness, Danny unconsciously erected another barrier of dislike against the man, who, if he was not a Yid, was at all events an Englishman and, as such, suspect in the eyes of any decent man. It was dirty, he thought, the way he kept pressing Agnes to have still another wee port.

Three rounds of drinks—two on Jim and one on Alf—had cheered them before they went to eat. Danny was well aware that he had a little more than enough, but he was secure in his conscious aloofness from his companions. Rooted in suspicion and disapproval, he saw himself taking part in a silly game. The clatter of the lounge was distracting, the task of picking his way among the tables confusing, but he was determined not to surrender his integrity to this cabal of two fancy men with more money than they knew what to do with and two women reduced to giggling nonentity by port wine and the allure of easy money. He would stick it. Jim was generous, and Agnes was happy. But that this was his idea of a night out, or that he approved this way of carrying on, he would never admit.

The silence imposed by this frame of mind made him a dull figure at the dinner table, and what seemed a bevy of stiff-shirted waiters and a menu in French were only coals for the fires of his resentment. Jim, however, was in command, and Danny was morosely content that he should be so.

"I'll order yer dinner," cried Jim. Dinner at seven o'clock at night! "I'll keep ye right. Here, Francie!" he beckoned the chief waiter. "Francie and me's old pals. Eh, Francie! Aye, well, look here. We're havin' horse doover. Five, that's right. Then we're havin' chicken—done in thon pot affair wi' bets of veg.: ye know the stuff. I forget its bloody name. Then we'll have. . . . Well, I'll tell ye later what we'll have. Run you away an' get the horse doover. And send me that guy wi' the wine list."

Jim's intromissions with that document were extremely direct.

"Where's yer champagnes?" he demanded to know. "A drop of bubbly, girls, eh? How's that with you, Alf? Good! Here Antonio——" he addressed the wine waiter. "What's yer best? This. . . . Well, go and get a magnum of it and look slippy. We're mebbe from Greenock, but we're dry."

It seemed that Agnes and Lizzie could do nothing but laugh—laugh and admire the large knowingness of Jim and the wit of him. The tradition of their sort dictated a pretence of horror of his extravagance, but it was a delighted, admiring horror. They had surrendered. Individuality departed from them. The sisters became two pulpy, blonde masses of exclusively biological interest.

It was not merely his prejudice that made Danny dislike the meal. The *hors d'œuvres* seemed to him but arbitrary pickings from among a collection of left-overs. In the lottery of the waiter's dives into the casserole he was unlucky enough to get but a wing of chicken and an ambiguous cross-section of its rump, and a generous helping of small vegetables and gravy did not conceal the inadequacy of the portion from a man accustomed to have something like a pound of solid meat, five or six slices of bread and butter, about a quarter of a pound of cheese, and at least five cups of good strong tea for his evening meal. The champagne tingled feebly on his palate. That it was a high-class drink he knew, and the knowledge gave him a certain satisfaction, but in his heart he knew it to be a

poor wersh beverage, wholly lacking in the thick and odorous satisfactions of honest whisky.

Towards the end of the meal, highly decorative ices having followed the chicken though Danny had hoped for a lump of decent Cheddar, Jim was insistent that they should drink more.

"A wee likewer, Aggie? That's right. You, Lizzie? Ach, I know about you, Alf. Where's Antonio? Hey, boy! See here—four Starboard Lights. Cream de mong, understand? No speakee English? Away and— Four cream de mong, and put a snap into it. Oh, but you, Dan? Cream de mong? Good for the guts. . . ."

"I'll have a wee whisky," said Danny sombrely.

"That's right, Antonio," repeated Jim blithely. "Four cream de mong and a big Scotch. And put your back into it.

It was at this stage that Danny, for all the sobering influence of his preoccupation, began to lose his grip on the situation. It was as if the transparent walls of a sphere closed in upon him. Through these walls he could hear gusts and peals of laughter and could catch glimpses of his companions, of waiters, and of people at other tables—and through them occasionally he could shout a remark. Now they seemed to press very close upon him so that he felt sick and near suffocation, and then they would miraculously withdraw to allow him full contact with the world outside. Thus he heard Jim and Alf vehemently discuss where they would go next.

Jim was for the Dogs at the Winter Gardens, Alf for what he called a Hall. Jim boasted of having the right of entry to every music-hall in Glasgow and mentioned the managers by their first names, but he felt strongly that it would be fun to have a flutter.

"The girls want a flutter. Eh, girls?" Danny heard him cry. "You go to hell, Alf. The girls want a flutter."

He had his way, of course. Danny decided that he was drunk. Safe within his own crystalline walls, he felt indifferent to the antics of these flash people. Dogs or halls—it didn't matter now.

They removed themselves from the Commodore somehow, Danny aware only of an extremely palatial lavatory and of a long wait in the lounge for the ladies. When they came at length, he had some trouble with his hat, confusing it with the cloth cap of custom. Then, following a hiatus, he was sitting in the front seat of a motor car beside Jim

and being driven at a great pace down the Paisley Road towards Ibrox.

Suddenly the walls split and disintegrated, suddenly he was sober and aware of Jim, drunk, taking the most lunatic risks over the busy crossings of a Glasgow Saturday night and among the mammoth trams. He was afraid and, shortly, disgusted. Sounds from behind told him that Alf was making himself very agreeable to the womenfolk, and a blackness of jealousy invaded his mind. But nearly all his powers were absorbed by the devilment of Jim as a driver. The man would go smashing past a tram drawing up to discharge and take on passengers. In a spirit of mad fun he would guide the car almost to brush the skirts of an old lady crossing the street. Once, after a dash past the control at Morrison Street, Danny thought to hear the blast of a police whistle and reported it to his companion.

"Hell them and their whistles!" cried Jim gallantly. "I never heed them. The Super and me's old pals."

And so on through the twisting streets of old Govan, past the docks and the shipyards of the South Side, till the car drew up at length, and as by a miracle, at a floodlit gateway in stucco.

The sharp yelping of kennelled animals rose above the roar of the crowd within, and behind these recognisable sounds was a mysterious diapason of click-click-click, click-click-click, as of a machine working dispassionately. There were dark touting figures about, seeking to sell tips and discarded programmes, and a few grey and desperate figures begged the price of admission. But Jim dealt lordily with the situation in all its aspects, wafted them past the turnstiles through special gates and even past the Grand Stand into a separate and privileged building with the aspect of a villa and the atmosphere of a lounge under the control of the Public House Trust.

"This is the Club," he explained proudly. "Something like, eh?"

"Oh, this is posh!" cried Agnes.

"Well, nab that table at the window till I get the girl," ordered Jim. "Ye'll see the Tote and the racing from there. But what are you having first of all?"

Again it was a case of wee ports for the women; and Danny glanced anxiously at the flushed face of Agnes. Her response was to grimace at him mockingly. Alf declared for Scotch, and Jim was with him.

"Beer for me," said Danny grimly.

"For God's sake!" Jim appealed to him. "Beer!"

"Aye, beer. A wee dump o' Bass."

"Holy Mike!" sighed Jim. He hailed the waitress.
"Here ma lassie. . . ."

There was no getting away from the drinks. Sobered by the vicissitudes of the drive and conscious of virtue with only a small Bass before him, Danny saw the others as people abandoned. Jim was simply drunk. Lizzie and Agnes were in precisely the same condition of giggling helplessness, and that was horrifying. Something out of generations of Presbyterianism told Danny that decent married women should not behave thus, and when he thought of what such habits meant to the wife of a working-man, when he thought of Wee Mirren innocently asleep in the big bed on the other side of the River, he knew an angry disgust. It only added to his exasperation that Alf seemed reasonably sober and, with that advantage, looked to be paying rather excessive attention to Agnes.

He could not quite detach himself from the group, and it annoyed him that they would pay no attention to the Dogs. For himself, he got only vague impressions of what was happening under the arc-lights of the vast arena outside. He heard continually the click-click-click of machines registering bets, and was fascinated by the flicker-flicker-flicker of numbers on the great board at the far end of the ground. When the greyhounds came out to be paraded round the track in the centre of the ring he roused himself to an intense interest in the actuality of living things and was oddly touched when a bitch among them squatted to relieve nature. He pitied the beasts as they were boxed for the start, then awakened to eagerness when the bogus hare came scaring along the electrified rail and the flag fell and the eager dogs went tearing after their quarry. Ecstatically he marked how an old hand among them could cut a corner and from the fourth place take the lead, and how a powerful one among them could, by the mighty drive of its hind-legs, gain ground on the straight.

But it was the ecstasy of half a minute. The mechanical hare went miserably to ground under wooden boards, leaving the eager hounds to yelp in frustration and snap at each other. They were seized and chained and led away. The winning numbers flashed from a pillar. On the great board the totals for the next race went flicker-flicker-flicker. It would be half an hour before another batch of dogs came out to live their thirty seconds of madness.

A mug's game, Danny decided, especially since Jim showed no sign of indulging them in that little flutter he had promised. He finished his dump of Bass and sat staring through the window, a figure detached from the cackling group beside him. In that aggrieved isolation he remained until Jim's glass was empty and the call came to order for another round.

"Nothing for me," said Danny shortly. "I've had enough."

"Hell to that!" shouted Jim. He called the waitress.

"Here, ma lassie——"

"We've had enough, Jim," Danny said sharply. "It's time me and Agnes were getting home."

"Speak for yourself," snapped Agnes, and the Englishman laughed.

"Home!" protested Jim. "Ye'll be damned lucky if ye're home for yer breakfast." He hiccupped. Then he made a solemn suggestion, as if it were the product of a lengthy process of thought. "I vote we shoot up the road to the Trocadero."

"Oh, aye!" cried Lizzie, and added with pride: "The Trocadero's lovely."

"Oh, I'd love to see the Trocadero!" sighed Agnes.

"Come on, then."

Danny could not protest. Another drink, and he could have made a scene. As it was, he was lost between discomfort and a sense of being in the grip of major forces.

They went out into the dark behind the stand, and Danny was momentarily moved by the sharp sounds of a greyhound yelping to the stars. There was much facetiousness and coy giggling as they packed themselves into the car. Danny found himself again beside Jim and was uncasily aware that a hand groping for the gear-lever was not too capable of discriminating between it and his right knee.

Yet the journey into town was not so hair-raising as the outward dash had seemed. Perhaps an awareness of his condition had imposed some slight sense of responsibility upon Jim. The streets were certainly emptier now. The lamp-edged stretch of the Paisley Road was impressively straight and easy, with the peach-coloured lamps, swinging in the wind, heaving great shadows across it. As they crossed the new bridge, the steely surface of the River was aglow with the reflections of whirling sky-signs. Hope

Street rose like a racing-track before them. The traffic lights at the Sauchiehall Street junction shone green to allow the car to sweep westwards and, in a moment, draw up at a narrow but brilliantly-lit doorway that looked to Danny to be the side entrance to a great drapery warehouse with a stern, modernistic facade in concrete.

A huge commissionaire in a purple uniform turned the handle for them and pushed back swing-doors for them to enter. At the end of a narrow passage a boy in a buttoned suit of sky-blue accepted them into the bronze casket of a lift. This vehicle in its turn took them to a floor higher up in the building, to a desk where entries were mysteriously made in a large book and Jim handed over a note, to a lavatory of greater magnificence than Danny had ever imagined to adhere to such conveniences—with a machine for drying your hands in a jet of hot air!—and, ultimately, into a long, low room ebulliently furnished and decorated in crimson and gold.

The splendour of the setting, as he thought it, had all Danny's attention in the first place. Then he saw that even in this gorgeous environment Jim still appeared to be completely at home, addressing magnificent waiters in rail-coats as "Alec" and "Peter." Finally, another glass of whisky before him but his eyes wandering, he was awed and his mind immobilised by the realisation that most of the people at the tables about them were in fine clothes: the men in evening-dress, with fancy white ties and waist-coats and red or white flowers on their lapels, the women like creatures out of a play in fine, diaphanous frocks. With alarm he observed that the backs of most of the women shone bare and alluring almost down to their rumps.

Extreme discomfort seized him. Those naked backs communicated a perfectly sincere sensation of horrified disapproval. Something in him revolted at the display of wealth and at the affectation of accent and deportment he heard and saw about him. He despised what he would have called the softness of it all. Above everything, he had the feeling of being an interloper on this territory proper to the toffs.

In this state of self-consciousness he was rawly aware of the folly of Agnes in her cups. Now she was talking wildly and loudly and he knew of the woman who shared his bed that both defiance and pretentiousness, over and above the drink, were moving her to make this sorry exhibition of herself. Her face had gone red, her eyes were

hazed. She had torn off her hat, and her fair hair was miserably disordered. Now and again she laughed, so loudly and incalculably, that people all over the room turned to look at her.

It was as the result of one of these explosions that Danny suddenly caught sight of Blanche Pagan. She was at a table in a far corner of the room, but it seemed as if she were not interested in her companions and was absorbed by the spectacle of this tipsy woman. Though her appearance was respectfully familiar to him, Danny knew that she could not know who he was, but the apparition had the effect of sending him into a panic. There was the sudden stab of the fuller realisation that he was intruding. There was the swift horror at the thought that Leslie Pagan, the boss, must be in the building somewhere.

Just then, Agnes hiccupped loudly. Scores of eyes swung to look at her. She rose, her face drawn and grey, and it was plain that she was going to be sick. Dreamily and tottering as one blinded, she made for the exit, Lizzie, apprehensive, on her heels.

Danny got to his feet.

"I'm going to hell out of this," he said angrily to Jim.

"For the love of Christ!" Jim protested drunkenly and laid a hand on his arm; and Alf also eased himself out of his chair.

"Let me go, I tell you!" cried Danny, knocking their hands down. Through an avenue of blankly staring faces, he made for the lift.

CHAPTER FIVE

DEATH OF AN OLD SOLDIER

TO THE thin but piercing wail of Wee Mirren demanding food and attention Danny wakened about, six on the Sunday morning. The cry got from him an automatic response, but before he reached the curtained bed a quite lengthy series of dismal thoughts passed in flashes through his brain.

He was stiff, having fallen asleep on a deal chair before the fire. His head ached, and his heart pounded. In his mouth was a foul taste, as if a deposit of sticky filth were upon his tongue. He belched, and a gust of stale

whisky fumes passed through his nostrils. The gas-mantle above the mantelpiece was brightly alight and hissing in a businesslike way as he had left it. He swayed as he rose.

It was all explicable in the simplest terms. He remembered with extraordinary clarity how it had happened. In anger he had left the party at the Trocadero, but not so very drunk that he did not know what he was doing. He could almost feel the fresh wind that had blown down Sauchiehall Street to cool his heated face, could see still the blue light of the Scotstoun tram coming along past the Empire to take him home. Did he sit inside or on top? Have the exact fare ready for the conductor?

No, all that was lost. He did, however, remember coming up the stairs, having no difficulty with the key, and sitting down to wait for Agnes. In his anger he had meant to give her a leathering with his belt. Had he, or had he not, got a bit of cheese for himself from the cupboard? His notion was that he had. The sour taste in his mouth suggested as much. And here was Wee Mirren crying to be looked after.

He tended her deftly though his stomach threatened to turn on him and his head seemed like to burst. When he was done with her she lay happy, crowing at him past a finger in her mouth. That appeal he recognised, but he could not answer it. Now, fully awake, he realised that Agnes had not come home, and it was an awful thought.

His first impulse was just to dash out into the street, calling her name. A panic desire to waken the neighbours seized him. Then he thought of the police, and then of an ambulance wagon drawing up at the door. He put out a hand to the mantelpiece to steady himself.

A straight line of reason cut through the whorls of his mad alarms. Agnes had been too drunk to come home. Lizzie would have taken her with her—especially after the row. There had been a big row; that had to be admitted. The next step was not going to be easy, whichever way you looked at it. But that Agnes should have stayed the night with Lizzie was the essence of the business in the meantime.

Danny then became aware of an unendurable thirst. He moved to the sink, let the good cold water run at pressure through the tap for sheer delight in its cool briskness, and started to fill and drink cup after cup. In

the sixth of these, through the lens of the liquid, clear against the china, he suddenly saw the complacent, dark face of Alf. He put down the cup, staring straight in front of him but seeing nothing save a tall and flashy man's lecherous, leering stoop over a foolish, drunken woman. But he did not brood long on that ugliness. It was so deadly as to be decisive. To hell with Agnes !

He was unspeakably weary. He could not grapple with the enormity that haunted him. Nothing for it now but bed and sleep, sleep. He stripped quickly, letting his garments lie where they fell, turned out the gas, and groped his way to a place in the bed beside Wee Mirren.

When he wakened again all sense of time was gone from him. The curtains had been drawn, and the grey light of a winter's day filled the room. He turned his head to see the boy, Billy, on the chair before the fire that roared now ; he was reading. The gurglings of Wee Mirren rose from the floor where she crawled.

"What's the time, son ? " asked Danny.

"A quarter of twelve," answered the child, glancing at the clock on the mantelpiece. "Where's my mother ? "

"Staying with your Auntie Lizzie," replied Danny.

"Has Wee Mirren had her breakfast ? "

"Aye."

"Where's Peter ? "

"Out. Would you like a cup of tea ? "

"Aye. Make me one, son."

He wanted that cup of tea, but it could not cure unhappiness. The sheer decency of this young son of his, and the pathos of his position, cut him to the heart. Dear wee Billy, always quiet and orderly and practical, a standing reproach to the silliness of his mother and the folly of his father ! But while remorse gnawed at him, something in Danny rose in his own defence. At least he had come home, and if Agnes had come with him they could have made some sort of shape at carrying on the family life in the morning. But Agnes had not come home, and it looked as if the whole foundation of their community had been cut away.

His mind darting down ugly channels of speculation as to the reason why, Danny could yet not escape that obsessing sense of calamity impending. Something big and black had happened, never mind why. Lying there on the kitchen bed, he could make allowances for his own depression after drink, even for his wife's behaviour, and

yet there brooded over him the realisation that the old, safe life was falling to pieces about him. It was a grey, cold world he looked on. Agnes had gone over to the swank and silliness of new-rich Jim and Lizzie. Her head was turned. She had come to fancy herself too good for a working-man. She had left her children. The completeness of her conquest by the passion for pleasure was declared in this last, fatal act of staying away all night. If she had slept with Alf, that was only an incident of her essential infidelity.

He brooded for a time on his mental picture of Alf, and a bitter hate of that suavity made him want to inflict physical hurt on the man. But Alf—just an English nyaf! Agnes was the trouble, Agnes and her selfish folly. It truly amazed him that she should take this turn at such a time; for there came upon him as he lay miserable the awful knowledge that he and his kind were living in hopeless insecurity.

It was all very well that the boss, for old times' sake, had kept him in a job, but now he saw that the position was false and dark. There was no real work going on Clydeside. Up and down the River the yards lay empty, and he could remember the day when there was hardly a berth to spare for the orders that poured in: liners, battleships, oil-tankers, and everything down to tugs. It was no use a man trying to kid himself that all was well. It was bad—hundreds, thousands of his mates on the Dole or the Parish. That he had known and sought to hide from himself; but now he knew. The boss was a toff and a gentleman, but even the boss could not nowadays give real work and wages honestly earned to a man who had all his life wrought on that understanding.

The cloud hung over Danny till long after two o'clock had pealed from the tower of the University. He had had nothing but the tea Billy had made for him. The boy had cooked a rough meal for himself and Wee Mirren—two rashers of bacon, tea, and bread and jam. Then in his queer, businesslike way Billy had dressed the baby for the open air, got the go-cart down the stairs, seen his sister out to it, and wheeled her off for an airing in the park at Whiteinch. Danny could not face food. Peter had not returned. Sunday afternoon began to trail its drab languors over him.

His body would have resigned itself to sleep, but there was something at the core of his brain that urged him to

do something. What that might be he could not determine, but the urge was active enough to keep him restless, and he was moved at length to rise by the sheer need for a positive grasp on existence.

His head spun as he stepped out of bed, and his stomach rose within him. A hand on the chair, he stooped for his socks and nearly fell into the fireplace. It was a weariness to dress, dismally complicated by the fact that they were his best clothes, smelling of stale smoke, that Billy had piled up ready for him. To get the old suit down from the hangers behind the door was an undertaking. But he could automatically fill the kettle at the sink and put it on to boil for more of that strong tea, which was all he craved.

He was at his third cup when familiar steps and familiar voices sounded on the outside stairs. A movement of the hand was checked so that the saucer out of which he had been drinking remained poised near his chin. He listened intently. Somebody laughed. There was a shuffling of feet, and a key rattled in the lock. His hand trembling a little, he placed the saucer on the table. People were crowding the tiny lobby.

"Hullo, Dan!"

That was Agnes home again.

"Hullo," he answered.

The moment was pregnant. Anything might have been said and done then. But there followed Agnes into the kitchen Jim and Lizzie. No sign of Alf. Jim was as cheerful as ever.

"Hullo, hullo, hullo," he cried. "Havin' a drop of tea for your dirty mouth, you drunken ol b? By God, ye need it! Nice cargo you had last night, Dan. Feel like a bit of chewed string myself, if you want to know. Gees, what a night!"

It was not blarney, Dan saw at once. According to Jim, they had had a good night and must pay for it. The man saw it all as having been very funny.

"As for Agnes," Jim resumed cheerfully, "Christ, ye'd have laughed! Talk about a jag—she had one on, and then some. Couldn't get sense out of her this morning till she had a pint of champagne in her tank. Ye'd miss her when you wakened, Dan?"

Lizzie cackled at that.

"Oh, I felt like death warmed up, right enough," she sighed. "That's me finished with port wine. I'm telling

you. It was a rare tare all the same. Ye enjoyed yourself, didn't ye, Danny?"

Danny glanced at his wife, and her eyes avoided his.

"And what about your fancy friend, Alf?" he grimly asked Jim.

"Alf? God knows!" Jim turned gravely to Agnes. "Did you see Alf after we left the Trocadero? Damned if I can remember."

"I don't remember," said Agnes emptily.

"Ach, we can remember sweet dam' all, the lot of us," observed Jim fatalistically. "It's some fresh air we're needing. Come on, the lot of you, and we'll run down to Luss. Are ye game, Dan?"

"Not me," said Danny. "There's some bairns to look after in this house."

He glanced his challenge to Agnes, and she answered it, her eyes hard.

"Billy can look after everything fine," she said.

"Och, come on, Dan," Lizzie urged.

"On ye go, the lot of you, if you want," said Danny, stubborn. "I'm staying where I am."

It was just like Jim not to perceive the signs of tension in the air.

"Ye're still drunk, ye old b. That's yer trouble. Away back to yer bed and sweat it out of ye. We're away. See ye when we come back."

They left him alone, and once again he heard their laughter on the stairs. It angered him, but behind his passion there weighed on him more onerously the dead burden of bafflement. The downrightness of his wonted philosophy had been robbed of its power, and for the first time in his simple life he had lost his way in a maze of conflicting relationships and responsibilities. That awareness seemed to have its physical effects. Habit urged him to do something—to set to the washing of the dishes, to go for a walk—but he could neither do anything nor believe that anything was worth doing.

For a long time he pottered aimlessly about the little house. Now he would look into the boys' room and helplessly contemplate its untidiness. Then he would pick up the Sunday paper and read the bludgeoning headlines on the front page, forgetting at the same time the rich interest of the football section at the back. One of Billy's coloured comics held him for a time. At another moment he found

himself staring into the press where Agnes's clothes drooped, deflated and tawdry, from their hangers.

Nothing but impatience with these dissatisfactions drove him out of the house at last. At least he could walk up the road to meet Billy and Wee Mirren. It was all that Sunday in Glasgow could offer him.

Walking along, he savoured with distaste the sour flavour of the day. It depressed him to pass doorsteps off which the morning milk and the newspapers had not yet been lifted. For the first time he realised that people of his sort lived amidst untidiness—the gutters littered with discarded papers and cigarette cartons, groups of aimless girls and boys leaning against the windows of Italian ice-cream shops, and a horde of halfpinks, Peter among them, playing football on a patch of bare ground, their shouting coarse and offensive against the depressed peace of the Sabbath afternoon.

It was more cheerful on the Dumbarton Road, and he was touched to a wistful envy by the quiet neatness of the streets of little villas to the north of it. He saw how the rows of limes and chestnuts set by the kerb made for grace and decency, and he wondered if he should not have done better with his life, and studied and saved to be a foreman with a wee house of his own. Other fellows had done it. And why should the desire have come to him so late, too late?

The sight of Billy approaching with the go-cart drove those sombre considerations from his mind. The vision of his innocent children touched him, but he had great joy in being with them again, as if after a long absence. Eagerly he listened to the tale of their outing and, as he wheeled the go-cart down the hill again, gaily promised them sweets from the first shop they could find open. Then they were to go home and have tea and a game together.

"Is my mother home yet?" asked anxious Billy.

"Aye, she's been home, but she's away out a motor run with your Uncle Jim and your Auntie Lizzie."

"I wish she was home," said Billy doubtfully.

But they had great fun over their tea and a grand play afterwards, Danny growling first as a bear under the table for the benefit of Wee Mirren and then spending a thoughtful half-hour over Billy's favourite game of Ludo. They kept it up far beyond Wee Mirren's bedtime, and even then Danny promised Billy that he might stay up

to read and himself took over the job of putting the baby to bed. He gave her a bath. He made and fed her with saps of bread and milk and sugar. For quite a time he played with her while she lay gurgling in the big bed, delighting in her small, happy laughter until her yawn told him it was time to stop.

When it was all over and the kitchen was quiet that the infant might sleep, but only then, his worries returned to plague Danny. There was no sign of Agnes returning, no sign of Peter, and the sense of irrevocable disruption gnawed at him. It came to him sadly now, and he could have wept at the sight of Billy, the good wee boy, bent over his book on the chair and at the thought of the baby's trustful helplessness. He did not doubt that Agnes would come home again, but she had already committed her sin of defiance and neglect. Defiance—well, that did not matter; it was between the two of them. But to work out her revenge through the children seemed to him an awful thing. And could she stick to her oath against a succession of wee ports?

It was about nine when he spoke quietly to Billy, looking up from those football reports he had neglected in the agony of his afternoon thoughts.

"Ye'd best get ready for yer bed, son," he said.

"I'm just finishing a story," the boy replied.

"Well, finish it quick and away with you."

In a minute or two Billy closed his book, yawned largely, and rose.

"I wonder where my mother is?" he said.

"I told you she was out motoring," Danny spoke sharply.

"She'll be back soon enough. Away and get ready and mind your own business."

Just then the door-bell rang. Danny hesitated, listening for sounds of talk outside, and, subconsciously, to hear if Wee Mirren had stirred to the peal. There was not a sound to be heard.

"Away and see who that is," he commanded the boy.

In a trice the child was back, his eyes wide.

"It's wee Tommy Stirling," he gasped. "His father's ill, and they want you along."

"Come in, Tommy!" cried Danny, and as the small boy entered shyly: "What's the trouble, son?"

The red eyes and smeared face of the child told that he had been crying. Out of breath and palpably scared, he told his story through a storm of sobbing.

"It's my father. He took a turn at his tea. He's coughing blood—and I'm feared he's going to die. My mother sent me for ye. She wants you there quick. Oh, I'm feared, I'm feared!"

"That's all right, Tommy," Dan comforted him briskly. It was as if he leaped to embrace the distraction. "He'll no' be so bad as all that. I know these turns of his. They give you a start, but your father's good for a while yet. Wait till I get to him."

Already he had grasped his coat and was slipping into it.

"See here, son, you stay her with Billy and don't worry yer wee head. I'll run along and see what's what. Billy—give him a piece and put him in beside Wee Mirren. He'd best stay the night. Tell your mother. I'll away. . . ."

He was out and down the stairs before the children knew it. Up the street he ran for the tram along the Dumbarton Road. All the spirit of him, all his racial capacity to face a crisis dourly, rose almost happily to the occasion.

2

That Jess Stirling had been waiting for him anxiously he knew when the door of the little house above the kennels opened even before his foot was on the lowest rung of the wooden ladder that led to it. She came out on the landing to caution him. They spoke in whispers.

"He's terrible bad, Dan," she confided tearfully. "It came on him last night. I was up till seven this morning with him, and then he took another fit of bleeding at his tea the day. I've never seen him so bad, and I'm feared, oh, I'm feared!"

He grasped her plump arm and squeezed it firmly.

"It's just that you're tired out, Jess. Ye'll have had no sleep?"

"No," she responded emptily. "What with the bairns and the house——"

"I've left Tommy with Billy," he explained quickly. "He can sleep the night there. Is there a neighbour can take in Nance and Peggy?"

"Mrs. Macpherson might. But, Dan——"

"Away and get them ready and take them across," he said. He felt the mood to command upon him, and he was vaguely confident that the weary woman responded

gladly. "I'll stand by here, and when you come back we'll see what's to be done. Has the doctor been?"

"Half an hour ago. He said there was nothing he could do. There's a bottle."

Patting her back, Danny urged her into the kitchen.

"You keep yer mind easy, Jess," he insisted. "Get the weans away first and then we'll see. It'll just be one of his turns."

The big kitchen was warm but shadowed. The paraffin-lamp had been turned low and shone towards the door and away from the bed on which Joe Stirling lay. The light of the fire played on the frightened, eager faces of two little girls. Danny touched their heads in passing, whispered a word of greeting, and moved on to peer down at the wasted face of his friend. There was a brownish smear on the pillow.

It was like looking on one dead, and Danny floated off for a moment on a cloud of sad and tender thought, only to be surprised out of that abstraction by the sudden realisation that two eyes had opened wide and were fixed on his.

"Dan!"

It was a whisper only, but there was gratitude in it.

"Joe, old pal," he whispered back. "But not a word. Ye're not to speak. I'll be here with ye, Joe, if ye want me."

He would have grasped a hand if one had lain on the coverlet to hold. Instead, impulsively, he put one out of his own and ran the fingers of it gently across his friend's curly, greying hair.

He sat down on the deal chair by the bedside and waited for Jess to get the children ready. When they appeared from the shadows behind, dressed for out of doors and carrying pathetic bundles wrapped in newspaper, he rose to go to the door with them and gave Jess his counsel.

"Stay you out for a bit if you can," he confided. "See the lassies into their beds and have a cup of tea with Mrs. Macpherson. It'll do ye good. And when ye come back, it's straight to bed with you. No, no!"—when she would protest—"ye've got to get yer sleep, and I'm as fresh as paint and game for a night of it. Go on, lass, and don't worry yerself one wee bit."

He found a curious contentment in being alone with Joe, perhaps because—though this he could not know—it restored to him the sense of purpose. While he sat there

before the fire, passing now and again to the bed to peer into the drawn face, his mind was strangely at ease. The sordid vicissitudes of the day and of the night before lost all their urgency and receded into distant memory to lose reality and meaning. He did not brood at all on the crisis that seemed to have arisen between himself and Agnes. Indeed, in the sweetness of fireside reflection his mind went back to the days of the war and to pictures of camp and trench in three continents and to the good comradeship of Joe, now apparently asleep at his elbow.

It was blissfully quiet in the kitchen. He could hear the zoom of the trams along Argyle Street, the occasional rushing of cars, and the impatient hooting of their horns. Once in a while a train, passing through the tunnel below, shook the antique building. But the real sounds were the loud ticking of the clock on the mantelpiece, the fall of coals from the fire, and, when he listened, the long-drawn, troubled breathing of Joe. These things were of a little world in which he was content. It would have satisfied him to know that he could spend all the long hours of the night alone with his friend.

Before the full hour had passed, however, he heard the footsteps of Jess on the wooden stair. She brought the fresh chill of the night with her.

"How has he been?" she whispered anxiously.

"Champion," Danny replied. "Not a cough, and he's slept like a bairn."

"Ye're good to us, Dan," she said thoughtfully.

"Enough of that," he remonstrated, embarrassment coarsening his phrases. "Away you and lie down. That's all that matters the now."

"Dear knows I'm weary," she sighed. "Ye'll call me, though, if he stirs. If I could just have an hour's lie-down. That'll do me fine."

"Ye'll lie till midnight anyway," Danny declared firmly.

"Promise, then?"

"Away with you!" he protested, giving her a playful push.

He watched her bend over her husband, flick a sheet into order with a deft hand, and disappear behind a curtain at the darkened end of the room. He heard the creak as she laid her tired body on another bed in there. The silence was his own again; and his unconscious prayer was that she might sleep long, that Joe might be spared

the rack through the small hours, and that he himself might be left to the satisfaction of keeping watch for them both.

The world grew smaller and smaller about him as the external noises of the Sabbath night grew rarer and fainter. He heard the last of the trams moan into the distance. Only once in a while did a rushing roar signify the passing of a belated motor. Now and again the footsteps of a late pedestrian reverberated along the cliffs of the tenements a hundred yards away. Deeper and deeper grew the silence until, from beyond the narrow circle of clock and hissing coal and a leaking tap tinkling in the courtyard outside, there came only the monstrous peals of the University bell announcing the hours : so loud, so arrogant, that he wondered how anybody could sleep within a mile of its clangour.

But Joe Stirling seemed easily at rest every time he tiptoed to the bed to look at him. He lay so still in his back that sometimes Danny, a lump of apprehension in his throat, had to watch with narrowed eyes for the rise and fall of his chest and strain his ears to catch the weak, strained rhythm of his breathing. Nor was there a sound from where Jess lay behind the curtain. Beyond the tending of the fire there was nothing to distract him from the thoughts that revolved, slowly and without urgency, in his mind.

Thus seeing his life and all life in the mirror of the fire's hot heart, he had dozed over when a horrible sigh of breath painfully intaken brought him with a jerk to his feet. That terrible sound was followed by the uglier, more urgent burbling noises of choking. Joe. . .

He leapt to the man and with strong, tender arms raised his friend to the sitting position, and against that posture the tortured body protested jerkily. The man's head hung forward. Danny could feel with his arm the labouring of his torso as he gasped and groaned and coughed in the battle for breath. There came a spasm of almost ecstatic violence, to be followed by a strange calm as a dribble of blood and sputum fell from the quivering lips to the counterpane.

Suddenly Dan became aware of a spoon held out before his eyes.

"The medicine," whispered Jess's voice urgently.

He grasped the spoon with his left hand, and lowering his right arm to get Joe's head back, slipped it between

the parted lips. They closed on it as if unwillingly, but automatically the tongue sucked at what lay in it, and Danny watched the motions of swallowing on the skinny throat. Then, as Joe sighed like a child that has drunk deep, he gently lowered the head and shoulders of his friend to the pillow.

"He's fine now," he said to Jess. She was wiping the mess from the counterpane.

"Aye, they're terrible, these turns," she whispered back.

"I'll bet you he sleeps till the morning," Danny insisted with conviction. "Away back to yer bed." He lied, "It's just turned eleven."

"No, I'll sit with him now. You have your work in the morning."

"I'm tellin' ye, there's plenty of time. Ye've another hour yet. I'll give ye the knock at twelve."

"Ye're a good soul, Dan," she whispered across the body of her husband.

"Away with you, and don't blether!"

Thus, more adroitly than he knew, he recovered his agreeable isolation. The sense of crisis encountered and survived lent to his meditation before the fire a fresh quality of satisfaction. Now he was re-established as the man of action he had to be in order to be happy. To handle the job in hand—that was his fate and his delight. Only thus could he be content. After his wanderings in that world of drinks and fancy food and swank that Agnes loved he was happy to be concerned entirely with looking after Joe and keeping the fire going and letting Jess have a sleep.

The bell of the University proclaimed the hour of one to the city, and he hoped that Jess had not heard that witness to his lie. Then the lamp on the mantelpiece burned low, and he must search for the can of paraffin and, in the light of the fire, fill the container and trim the wicks. Once, hearing from Argyle Street the raw laughter of young men, he began to think of Peter and the problem he represented; but he deliberately wrenched himself free from that intrusion by the world outside the warm kitchen and went over to see how Joe fared. His friend slept in his weakness.

He heard two strike, and three, and four and then he had to admit to himself that he would gladly fall asleep. A faint nausea of hunger troubled him, and the pounding of blood in his head told him that he was not yet free of the poison of the night before. Something stubborn in him would have kept him awake and watchful. He